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FLORENCE TEMPLAR.

—“ O bards that call to bank and glen,
Ye bid me go to Nature to be healed,
And lo ! a purer fount is here revealed,
My lady Nature dwells in hearts of men.”

Wm. 570.



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FLORENCE TEMPLAR;

OR,

MY AUNT'S STORY.

CHAPTER I.

TEMPLAR CROSS.

THERE was not a pleasanter town in England than Templar Cross in those days.

Country towns then ranked higher than they do at present. Watering-places and foreign travel have usurped their place. Public roads were very bad, and travelling about the country was both difficult and rare. It was no uncommon thing then for a person never to have been beyond his native county.

It was also a time of war, which in my youth

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tended to make "Templar Cross" a desirable residence, from its celebrated good and cheap market, and its beautiful, healthful neighbourhood. Perhaps we were rather vain and boastful; but we were apt to number the different families who lived among us from choice, where the head was independent of profession, and possessing both worldly goods and good birth.

Templar Cross was famous for its society. We had also a handsome church, and an ancient, grim town-hall, in which the mayor and his train of aldermen and burgesses were wont to administer justice and rule the town, and where, at other times, there was many a merry assemblage of young folks who danced away the night far into morning.

We had pretty good shops; one or two had the great distinction of glazed windows. I confess to a great prejudice in favour of those overhanging buildings with gable-ends and fantastic shape we then had, instead of the bare, level, sash-windowed houses of the present day. We had, too, our legends, and our remains of an old castle, which still gave its name to one of the streets. Whispers of a hidden subterraneous passage, which in olden days led to the river, charmed my imagination. How I longed for some enterprising person to dig

till it was found! Across our beautiful winding river, then full and undisturbed by modern improvements, stood a wee, scattered hamlet, and the smallest of all churches. Here, my father said, the tide once flowed, though now it had receded four or five miles further down; and this hamlet had the reputation of being originally a village for lepers. I don't know if it was true, but I loved these old tales dearly. However, I must not linger, for it is not of the old legends I speak. I only wished to show you that Templar Cross was not quite a common everyday kind of place.

There were other charms which we still possessed disputed by no one. The woods, the valleys, and the wide-spreading common, afforded endless and rarely beautiful walks and rides. Grand and more extended views I dare say existed. Certainly we had no mountains, though a very short ride would bring one in view of some very beautiful gray and waving hills, which stood to me for mountains. Our scenery was picturesque, homelike; and the situation of the town itself, on the top of a steep rocky hill, with its long straggling street backed by orchards and strawberry gardens, which ran out to the rugged furze-blossomed hill, was considered by travellers as very "foreign" in its aspect. Whether this was

complimentary or not, I could not judge; but no one with any taste for nature could help being struck with the beauty.

Our small community was in good order; justice strictly and wisely held its sceptre. The fact is there were really public-spirited men in those days—men who would devote time and trouble, even if they had not much money to spare, for the good of society. This, too, has changed; at least in Templar Cross, from all I hear. No one thinks it now his business, and unless there is a salary appended no one thinks he need give his time or his care. Much neglect, many abuses, have crept in. Power has fallen into hands where neither experience nor education have gone before.

But I must stop here. Old people are too apt to think nothing safe or right but that to which their own youth lent its bright colouring. The present is to them shaded with their own age and sorrows. It is difficult to keep up with the march of Time, and easier and pleasanter rather to sit and dream wistfully of the past. I was always something of a dreamer. Circumstances held me back from active life in my early youth. A severe illness left its mark on me for many, many years; and I never could join the happy, merry parties of

young people I saw set out and return from their rambling walks, laden with flowers in summer, or with rich spoils of holly for Christmas.

I used to wonder, and try to picture to myself those scenes they were familiar with. This brook, that bridge, certain thick shady woods, and wide soft meadows, I knew by name, and in fancy, so well, but never saw in those days. Perhaps my highest idea of pleasure was connected with mossy grass, high spreading trees, and singing birds. I longed with intense longing to sit, if only once, by the river, close enough to dip my fingers into it; or to see with my own eyes that primrose bank I heard so much of, and from which my high China jars and old Venice glasses were so often filled, not only with the pale primrose, but with sweet hedge columbines, blue-bells, and woodbine, often too sweet for my room.

Yet, prisoner as I was, I had my own peculiar store of pleasures. I do not remember ever feeling dull in my life. Sad-hearted I have often been, but not dull. I was tenderly watched and cared for.

My father—but I should only weary you, kind nieces, if I said all I cared about him. Enough for my present purpose to remind you

that he was *the* medical man, the "Doctor" of the neighbourhood. He worked hard, and seldom knew the enjoyment of a night's rest. Very seldom was he at home for many hours together, having to ride many a mile over rough and hilly parish roads, to visit his numerous and scattered patients. My first remembered sensation of pleasure was the sound of his voice, and then the well known characteristic tread, first to the surgery, and then, almost always, up-stairs to my own little room; the cheerful hearty reply to my mother's anxious inquiries, in a tone of voice more round and powerful, than low or soft; those never failing words, "And how is my little Jenny?"

My mother always had his slippers ready, and every fret and worry was hushed and put aside when the father returned. Nothing but smiles and cheerful words greeted him, at least from her. Often her chief work during the day had been the preparing and contriving to keep hot, and yet not over-done, some delicate morsel, when he had missed our early dinner-hour.

Then the treat, the rare treat, it was if he could remain at home a whole evening—if there was no old lady or gentleman expecting a chat with Dr. Wilson; for his genial presence was welcome to

many, and as healing as the drugs from his shelf, in many cases.

Sometimes, on these occasions, he and my mother would stroll about the garden, while my brothers ran races, or watered the flowers; and "Jenny" was not forgotten. I was carried down and placed in a chair, or, now and then, if better than usual, I was allowed to try and take a turn, supported by my father's arm.

In winter it was full as pleasant to draw round the glowing fire which my father loved to have; my mother bringing out her never failing mending-basket, for she and I to sew, while my father, or the boys, read aloud. The only shadow then was the dread, unexpressed but always felt by my mother, of the clanging surgery bell. When this came, blank looks were joked away by my father, and sometimes he could let out a few impatient, hasty words at the bustle, the anxiety about cold and wet, which poor mother seemed never able to overcome. The fetching of wrappers, which were sure to be rejected with a half comic, half tender smile—his look of regret at the snug room and bright fire, returning perhaps for a moment to say something kind, if he had been impatient before, to his wife, or to stroke my head—the hearty

"Good night!" and then the bang of the street door! Sighs and yawns came then; the room looked darker; the fire no longer glowed with such brilliancy; a chill air crept in; and if we attempted to continue our reading the book grew all at once heavy and dull, difficult to understand—my mother would try to explain, hesitate, falter, then shut it up with, "Leave it, my dears; we won't read any more to-night: your father will explain it another time. Keep up the fire, pray! It is very chilly!" &c., &c.

As I grew older, I was very fond of sitting alone in my own pleasant room. It had a bow window looking into the street. I could catch a peep of the church steeple, and the tops of the churchyard limes.

I could look a long way down the street, till gables, and windows, and chimneys, mingled together and were lost in distance.

Very often of an evening there was practising in the belfry. Our town was famous for good ringing, and was thought to beat all the neighbouring parishes, in their occasional trials of skill. It was a thrilling delight to me, these bells—certainly my first idea of music. Often my work dropped into my lap as I watched the people pass, with a keen interest which for some unknown reason

I never imparted, feeling shy and ashamed of it. I had quite a long list of acquaintance, attaching a history of my own weaving to each, often without knowing even the name. Needlework was a great resource to me. I was fond of it; and excelled, for my years, in my fine and invisible darning, my curious and original samplers, and my even stitching of shirt collars. Reading I loved, and looked upon it as a prime treat when my father pulled from his pocket some volume which a kindly acquaintance lent him "for his poor little maiden at home." But books were scarcer, and harder to get then. I was driven to read some few so often that I knew them by heart; so, after all, my needle was my chief friend. I have not yet mentioned my favourite pleasure, my cherished, secret pleasure, which was hoarded up as a miser might his gold. We generally keep the best for the last; as my young brother always answered when asked why a piece of pastry was always put aside in a corner of his plate.

Even now, at this distance of years, something of the old sensation of excitement comes over me as I think of this subject. I wish I were eloquent, and could do justice to this episode of my life. I fear I tire you, my dear nieces; but you pressed me into

the service, and I must prose on in my own fashion. Well, exactly opposite my window stood a large, heavy, white gate—a very imposing gate, with two huge balls on either post; each ball having a small cross on it which had been gilt, but was now tarnished. A short but broad avenue of lime-trees led from this gate to the house.

How I watched the spring green as it burst on those trees, or the gradual effect of autumn's sad touch, or the last whirl of the poor, brown, dead things, in the harsh, whistling, winter blasts! How I have watched the rooks building their nests, and listened to their "Caw, caw!" which sounded, now cheerful, now sad, according to my own mood. And how I have thought of and dreamed about those who once lived in that house!—that stately, venerable house, clothed with myrtles that had braved many a winter, and spread their lovely blossoms; though there were none to admire but the obscure little maiden seated in her chamber-window.

There was something very mysterious-looking in the whole place. When quite a little child, I used to see an elderly gentleman pacing up and down the broad gravel road, by the hour together. His rich velvet coat and embroidered waistcoats, his costly lace ruffles and curiously powdered head, and, more than

all, that man in brown who always followed him, and never seemed either to leave or even look away from him, made a deep impression on me. Every day, whether it rained, blew, or shone, paced the gentleman, with a tripping step and pompous gait, his hands always crossed behind him, to and fro, to and fro; while in his very footsteps, but with a very different walk, followed the "brown man," as I learned to call him. I never saw them speak to each other; and when the walk was finished, and the gentleman turned up the broad steps to the front door, the follower stood aside and bowed very low, but immediately mounted the steps and entered the house after him.

Then came a day when this ceased. Unbroken solitude reigned for about a week, and then I saw a grand and pompous train come out, one by one, from that door, down the steps, and through the avenue, into the street; the great white gates having been, unseen by me, posted wide open. I saw waving plumes, black as the raven, and long cloaked figures; while heavy, dark chariots awaited them, forming a long line in the street. Numbers of the townspeople followed on foot, while a silent but wondering concourse of staring women and children stood about in groups. Above the smothered whispers, orders, and directions, the church bell tolled solemnly and deeply.

They passed on at last ; but that procession, those plumes, that tolling bell, haunted my dreams for many a night. I heard, too, half-whispered rumours as to how Sir Edward Templar had died mad, and had been so for years ; that his wife, Lady Templar, was a proud and hard woman, and by her iron temper had rendered their life a stormy and unhappy one, though they were grand and rich. Many anecdotes, doubtless wholly untrue, or at least greatly exaggerated, went the rounds of the town, and then the Templars and their concerns seemed to die away altogether and be forgotten. But to me, from that day the place became invested with a shadowy awe, and I shuddered as the night-breeze whistled through the trees ; yet a species of fascination kept me chained to my seat, with my eyes fixed on the dark, sombre outlines of the tall, quaint chimneys standing out in strong relief from the sky. Dreamy thoughts stole over me sometimes ; and my imagination kindled, and, as it were, took fire, till my whole small life seemed to be involved in some curious way in the fate and history of that house.

It was deserted now. Weeds and grass soon covered the poor Sir Edward's favourite promenade. The white gate became weather-stained and mouldering. The beautiful myrtles were suffered to grow

all untrained—whole branches being often broken off by the wind. The windows were darkened by shutters, and no smoke ever curled up from the numerous chimneys. The rooks alone gave signs of life: they sailed about, and were busy as before; but to me, their black plumage and hoarse note partook of and even added to the funereal shadow which spread over everything. It was said that Sir Edward had been extravagant, and that in consequence the estate was encumbered.

Lady Templar and her two daughters were in France; the son, the present baronet, Sir Edward, had some appointment or office about Court. It was a very old family, tracing its existence in England to the Conquest, according to an ancient and popular rhyme which ran:—

“When England was won by the Norman lord,
He was bravely helped by the Templar’s sword.”

Our town derived its name from a stone cross, said to have been erected by one of the family, in token of his gratitude for the birth of a son and heir, after being for many years childless. As much of this same cross as was spared under the Commonwealth, remained a study for the antiquary, a pretty object for an artist’s sketch; and its worn stone steps were a

favourite seat for sundry old women and young children. At one time, some audacious person tried the novel experiment of pasting large printed bills on its half-ruined sides ; but my father waxed angry at the desecration, and means were taken to prevent a repetition. Once we very nearly lost our old cross by the cutting a new road, and there were a few in the place who thought it anything but an ornament. But fortunately there was also a larger number who were proud of it ; so in course of time some wooden posts connected by chains were placed round it, showing everyone that it was to be respected ; while those who liked it might easily creep under the chains and take their usual seats, watching the changing of horses of the fine new mail coach, which three times a week, to the astonishment of the people, drew up in pride of speed, and to the sound of horn, before the "Templars' Arms"—an inn facing the cross.

At this time, just as my anxious mother began to be rather uneasy at my long, solitary watches at my window, and my increased gravity and paleness, to which were added reports from our old nurse of my sleep-speeches of funerals and old houses, my attention was drawn in another direction.

By degrees I thought rather less of the Barton, and more of a young cousin I had never seen, but who was daily expected by his aged grandmother to return from sea. He was an orphan now—his father having died since the lad went to sea—and first cousin to my father, who dearly loved him, and was left his guardian. This was the first time of his coming to his new home, his parents having lived near London. His letters, very few and far between as they were, always created some excitement and stir in our household. They were read and re-read to his old half-blind grandmother, to the Rector, and many friends. They were commented on and criticised, as well as praised and prized.

“He shows a good spirit, the lad; but why in the world will he spell wrong?” was my father’s general remark, and it was sure to be followed up with, “Oh, Doctor, he is very young, and no doubt writes in a hurry. But what a fine bold handwriting the boy has; and his always remembering everyone with his love, shows he has the same tender, loving heart as ever—God bless him!” from my mother. Then my two brothers were sure to act Cousin Charles in their games for several days; we believed him to be a true hero, and as brave

as he could be. We looked with delight and wonder for the opening of a certain chest he wrote about, in which he said he had gathered remembrances for his friends. My brothers chuckled over a hint of Indian bows and arrows, while I thought of delicate pearly shells from those far away foreign shores I so loved to read about. I used to hear my mother, in a gentle, somewhat pathetic tone, wonder how the boy would get on with his grandmother, and hope that she would remember the ways of youth, and be willing to draw her purse-strings. I may as well say here, that this old lady, Mrs. Sutton, was reputed to be rich, although she only kept two maids, and allowed her old-fashioned garden, with its once trim and fantastic yew hedges and figures, to fall into wild disorder, rather than pay a gardener.

Yet what lilies of the valley still came from that garden, and what sweetly perfumed full cabbage roses! She was a solitary woman, having buried her husband and children many years ago. Her one only amusement was watching the street of an afternoon from her large window. She did not encourage visitors; and from her stern, repelling manner, was troubled with scarcely any, save my father, who managed, on the score of connectionship, not only never to quarrel with her, but even to

win her carefully qualified approbation. My mother did not fare so well. She could not always control her annoyance at the harsh and narrow dogmas Mrs. Sutton uttered. The old Rector called about six times a year, and in the fruit season he regularly received a dish full of some celebrated greengages, with "Mrs. Sutton's compliments." This was the extent of her visiting list. A dull home for a merry lad, hitherto the darling of loving hearts.

There had been a proposal started of his making our house his home; but it was rejected, on the score of being very impolitic. He was the proper—the natural heir to Mrs. Sutton, but she had her fortune entirely in her own power. She had—ungraciously enough, it is true—offered him to take up his abode with her, and she would be offended if he preferred another.

Cousin Charles himself wrote as if he wished to "cheer up his dear old granny." My father judged it well to give him some little warning as to the disposition of his relative, but hoped Charles' bright and affectionate heart might possibly make a way for itself, and that the less any third person came between the two the more likely were they to agree and like each other.

As you may suppose, all this was not lost upon

a girl who, like myself, lived so much alone, and possessed a quick imagination. To me Mrs. Sutton stood in the light of hardly less than an ogress—a cruel and dread relative, who was, of course, by mere force of contrast, to bring out the hero's character. I had only seen her once, when a very young child, and her stern countenance and strange costume could never be forgotten. She wore a close and stiffly crimped mob cap, coming straight across her chin. This was surmounted by a man's hat, with a high and peaked crown, with one short black feather. Gay colours were about her dress, for she loved bright chintz patterns, and on her shoes were an enormous pair of silver buckles. She leant on a high and gold-headed staff. She had not crossed her threshold for many years, not even to go to church; but she was seen occasionally by passers by bargaining with market-women, or covertly looking over her window-blind. Many persons, and my old nurse among them, held a secret but strong belief in witches. I sometimes whispered to myself, "Do witches look like that?"

Everyone, at least every self-reader, must be conscious of certain marked eras in the inner life, which are like the sudden opening of a door, the letting in new light—I was going to say giving

birth to a new sense: and it is almost this. A sudden flash comes, apparently without any preparation; though in reality, doubtless, the mind has been long preparing for this moment. The impression never dies out—it is there for ever. We may never again recall that one—that peculiar sensation—to be actually ours; but the remembrance of it abides, and we can in our own minds date from it and feel the change it has wrought. It may be a book, an expression, a drawing, a strain of music, the view of a scene long familiar, perhaps, yet only then first taken in; a word, a face—anything, in fact. It cannot be, I think, shared with any one in its full significance at the time, though in after years we may define it better. Memory may even lay her finger on it and translate it into actual speech.

My father was certainly a good-looking man, of rarely pleasant countenance. My mother, too, was both pretty and *piquante* when in good looks. Our white-haired Rector had been reckoned the model of a handsome man; and in his increasing years he was still a striking person. My brothers, too, were by no means ill-favoured lads when in Sunday gear; they were even comely. But my first vivid idea of beauty was my first sight of Cousin Charles.

It is a moment which stands even now alone—marked and distinct.

I must have been very shy and awkward, from the remarks my mother made, and her mortification at my cold welcome. But I now can feel the deep sigh I heaved from very oppression, as I looked up and saw him standing at our parlour door. I suppose he must have been about eighteen or twenty then. He had attained his full height; he was tall, and rather slim, though, at the same time, with no symptoms of outgrown strength. There was a radiant flush of health and vigour about him. Great suppleness was joined to strength and firmness. His naturally fair skin was embrowned, but not reddened, except when he pushed back his bright brown curls and showed the pure white of his forehead.

The features were marvellously fine in finish, and full of play. One could at once see the quick, easily roused temper flushing up, but met directly and subdued by a never-failing spring of tender affections.

His first words gave me the impression I never after lost, of the greatest possible tenderness qualified and heightened by manly strength. But descriptions are poor things: I cannot, as I would fain do, bring him before you; it is at best a mere picture.

He had a way peculiar to himself, and it was in

this attitude I now saw him. With his head a little on one side, his figure a little bent forward, holding his hat behind him, and with a look of inquiry and expectation pausing in the doorway ere he spoke or advanced.

“Jenny, my dear, do you not see your cousin? That is your Cousin Charles. Surely you have a better welcome than that.”

Then I felt a hearty shake of the hand, which was followed by a kiss.

“So this is little Jenny, eh? She does not deign to remember my jumping her one fine day, and how old Jenny boxed my ears for lifting the baby out of the cradle?”

Then he was inquiring after the said Jenny, and my brothers, and all the time I don't believe I said a word, but sat drinking in a new pleasure with deep, breathless satisfaction.

I well remember that I felt ashamed to take my crutch as usual, and walk out of the room in my limping fashion—a feeling I never was conscious of before.

But there was no help for it, as he was to join our dinner party. After the first step my crutch was gently taken and my arm transferred to his strong one. He guided me as cleverly as my own

father did. Such deeds of care seemed natural to him—I soon learnt to expect his aid on all occasions. I soon learnt to think his voice and hearty merry laugh as pleasant as the church bells. Our little parlour was often now full of sound and life, even though my father was absent; and our pleasant, though sober, evenings in the garden were changed into gala hours. He would coax my mother with a few words and smiles, and then out came the round table and the tea-tray under the walnut-tree. Not to give the maid any extra labour he ran backwards and forwards for everything; and then the fresh fruit was gathered by him, and flowers tied up with curious nautical knots presented to every one.

We learnt then how fully to enjoy our pretty little bit of garden ground; and tea over, my mother would linger idle, and my father forego both paper and book to listen to sea adventures. Or sometimes he and my father would have what he called a quarter-deck walk, when the lowered grave tones of the elder were gravely listened to by the younger, and we young ones awaited in tolerable patience and silence the moment when, sober discourse being ended, Cousin Charles would turn to us in another mood.

During one of our Rector's social calls I heard him remark with pleased surprise at the tact, as well as forbearance and good feeling, which made Charles keep the peace with his grandmother.

A month passed, and there had been no disturbance. He even taught her backgammon, and was careful to be at home till her very early bed-hour, beguiling her hitherto lonely evenings with his stories and games. It was the beginning of the hunting season, and one bright morning the hounds and horsemen swept by, and almost through our town, in all their excitement and glory of speed and colour. Everyone rushed out by back gardens, or by the shortest cut to the heath, where their course could be watched. Steady artisans tucked up their leather aprons, and ran as fast as their limbs would carry them. Clerks jumped off their high stools, servants dropped their work, and my father's surgery-boy left the weighing of drugs for a cheery "Whoop, and tally-ho!"

Our young sailor was reading aloud to my mother and me, when my brothers burst into the room to give the alarm. In another moment the book lay on the ground, and the three were in full chase, leaving my mother to hope they would not go too far and get heated, while I once more wished myself

a strong boy, and felt strangely moved at all the excitement I saw around. I watched long at a window which looked out on the country, and for some time an occasional peep of scarlet, or sound of the dogs' deep cry, riveted my attention. But ere long there was neither sight nor sound. It had passed on; and I took up the book, read a little, and wondered if Charles would soon return.

Alas! we saw him no more that day. Why did I say "Alas"? That expression escaped me unawares; for except a sore feeling of annoyance which dwelt in me afterwards, there were no really deplorable or grievous consequences—at least none for me to lament now, whatever might have been the first sensations at the time.

A kindly man, seeing our cousin's animated delight at the chase, called up from the rear a groom with a led horse, and expressing a firm faith in Charles' being able to sit the beautiful creature, pressed him to mount and "just see the end of poor Reynard." The offer was accepted. Although little prepared for such a gallop, the young sailor, not wholly unaccustomed to horses in his boyhood, sat firm, and was in one of the first at the death.

This led to a quickly formed friendship with the Squire, and an invitation to return to Glyn Lodge

for dinner, which was readily accepted, as well as the offer of a messenger to inform Mrs. Sutton where he was.

The Squire and his lady were very agreeable; the stables and stud first-rate. Mr. Carson, in the pleasantest way, offered him a "mount" for the next hunt; and this turned out to be a very long run, the sportsmen finding themselves nearly twenty miles from home when they had killed their fox. Glyn Lodge, though distant, was eight or nine miles nearer than Templar Cross, and again Charles became their guest.

On his return early the following morning, he was received in a most stately and cool style by his grandmother. She did not allude, however, to his absence or to his hunting: but a hard and steady frost set in, which his sunshine could never overcome. It was painful to see how he felt it—how the cold distant reserve hurt and wounded him; how he blamed himself for not supposing such ways would ill suit an old lady; and how he declined all further invitations, and strove to regain his footing. Once he abruptly entered on the subject, and begged her pardon for his neglect; but she cut him short with polite assurances that all apology was unneeded and undesired. She did not wish

to interfere with his acquaintance or his pursuits. Nothing would do. Poor Charles took it seriously to heart, and looked more annoyed and "put out" than I had supposed possible.

He began to express impatience for employment, and wrote to head-quarters. He had to wait, however, and meanwhile our winter's gaieties began. We were a very sociable and spirited set of people: cards for the elders, and dancing for the young, were much in fashion; nor did people think it necessary to turn their houses inside out, or to spend three times what they could afford, in order to be sociable and merry. Very unpretending was the style of our parties; but I believe few places had such pleasant meetings, and could gather so choice a set together. Charles forgot his home trouble, in some measure, in joining these parties, where he was a very favoured partner; and when at last his summons came he was as blank as we were.

Ours was the last threshold he crossed, and he shook his head at my mother's inquiries as to Mrs. Sutton's breaking the ice at the last, and showing some feeling.

"Oh no, she let me go without a blessing or loving word. She curtsied to me, and when I would have taken her hand she drew it away in annoyance. I

wish I had never seen those plaguy hounds. I would not have displeased her—kind as she was—for anything. Poor, old, lone-hearted dame! Don't let her think me an ingrate, or altogether gone to ruin, because of that unlucky run. As to the money, never mind; but she is my father's mother, and I would fain have had a bit of her heart."

Some say this old lady was never quite herself after her grandson's departure. The winter weather set in unusually severe. The cold was intense; and long before it changed many old persons left us—among them was Mrs. Sutton. My father said she was stricken with a death-chill from which she could not rally. Hardly six weeks after Charles left she was gone to the churchyard. My father and mother were the only relations to follow her; others there were none—save the young sailor, who was now fighting for his country on the deep sea.

The will was duly read. A hundred pounds was left to my father, in testimony of her esteem. To her grandson, Charles Sutton, her house and garden, "that he might have a home in case of his being wounded or disabled in the wars:" also the sum of 200*l.* a year, which she hoped "would be enough to enable him to live soberly and quietly. She believed, from observations made on his character and tastes,

that more would only be a snare, and lead him into evil company, and following after cruel field sports." Therefore, all the remainder of her money—and it was even double what had been supposed, from her long habit of saving—was bequeathed to different charities; except a handsome annuity to one Bridget Moore, spinster, and some fair provision for her two servants. All the furniture, linen, and plate, was for Charles. "Bridget Moore" turned out to be the daughter of a lady who had once kept an "establishment for a limited number of young gentlewomen," amongst whom had been Mrs. Sutton. Among old hoards an elaborate sampler was found, under which, in curious stitch, it was stated that this was "worked by Anne Lyttleton, in her fifteenth year, under the superintendence of her esteemed instructress, Mrs. Moore."

"Bridget," had been early left an almost penniless orphan, and after as much drudgery as her feeble health would allow in a London shop, she gained admittance into an almshouse lately built and endowed for "distressed gentlewomen." During her life, and with hundreds of pounds lying idle in the bank, Mrs. Sutton had not thought of helping her; but at her death, in a lengthy paragraph, she was remembered by a comfortable provision for the remainder of her

life—but only under certain conditions. She was obliged, under pain of forfeiting all, to wear the self-same costume in which it had pleased Mrs. Sutton to array herself. All was specified—from the buckles to the high peaked hat, the red or green petticoat, the flowery chintz sacque, the black silk mittens, and high staff. Strange is it to trace this love of power, strong in death! Many a last will and testament is a curious and a sad study, showing the snare and temptation money is, both in the spending, the hoarding, and the disposal of it at last!

Notwithstanding this sage reflection, I fear Cousin Charles' friends regretted keenly that he was not put to the trial. My father was quite angry for a week, and quite disliked to write the necessary letter and disappoint the lad. My mother wept and deplored the unlucky hunt; and everyone in the town expressed regret that Charlie Sutton was not to be a rich man.

It was very long before his answer to the letter arrived. Stirring scenes of death and danger, fighting and the glory of his country, then filled the sheet. Not till quite the end came any notice of Mrs. Sutton's death and will. He was sorry; he had hoped to see the old lady once more, and redeem his character in her eyes. She might have liked him better as Lieutenant Sutton; for, owing to his late

deeds, he had been promoted, and was, at the moment of writing, acting as first lieutenant in an important post. As to the will, he had strength and a good profession, which in those days was no bad thing. Already he had a good share of prize-money. He felt quite rich, with the house, his pay, and the hundred a year he already owned from his father.

As to letting the house, in answer to my father's question, he had rather have some honest old soul keep it aired and ready for him to return at any moment. He did not like strangers to meddle with the old place, and he begged that the garden might be kept up and made use of by anyone who liked, both as a resort and for any fruit, flowers, or vegetables there might be.

I had returned to my usual habits, and again sat in my own window, to spin out my old fancies. There were moments when a new feeling of depression just flitted round about me. There seemed less and less hope of my being like other girls. My father said seldomer, and with more waver in his voice, "Oh, she will be all right by and by!"

That mine was to be a marked and secluded life—that I was always to be a looker-on, and not an actor—I began to realise. There was also some amount of suffering—sometimes more, sometimes less—

involved in this state of health ; and somehow, as I advanced in my teens, and could reckon even years since it first came new and sharp, I did not find it less sore. And although it was true, what I so often heard said, not unkindly, " She is used to it ! " I could not heartily and honestly echo the words—at least if it implied that such use or habit made it less hard and painful.

CHAPTER II.

DRAWING AND DREAMING.

SPRING reigned sole queen with us now. She no longer played at hide-and-seek with Winter. Everywhere new life was springing. The atmosphere was full of growth and life's music. Even for the house-ridden, the pleasant perfume of newly dug earth and blossom was wafted in at open windows. A lovely tender green covered the tops of the churchyard trees, and clothed the old limes of the Barton avenue. The covering of matting which some careful hand had pinned over the myrtles was now removed.

One morning, as I gave my usual glance at the lone and stately place, I was surprised by the very unusual sight of several workmen about. Some were painting the grim old gateway with a bright coat which seemed strangely at variance with the gray tone of the house.; others were rolling the

broad gravel road; and a gardener, mounted on a ladder, was pruning and pinning the stray wreaths and branches. A tiny curl of blue smoke rose from one of the many curious chimneys. An old watchdog I had not seen for many a month, though occasionally he had caused his dismal wailing voice to be heard at night, now lay coiled up in the sunshine, now and then wagging his tail, or pricking up his ears lazily, as if pleased to see what was going on.

What could it all mean? I hastened into the breakfast-parlour in order to inquire, and I found my mother almost as eagerly curious as myself, hazard-ing various assertions or guesses as she prepared the tea.

"Lady Templar is coming back! Or, perhaps Sir Edward is going to marry and live here! How damp the house must be! there has hardly been a fire there all the winter. I hope they will have the sense to air the rooms thoroughly. It must be eight years, or more, since they left the place."

"Yes, mother, it is nine years ago," I said; for I had kept an accurate account.

I was still at the window, watching the men's progress in painting the gates, when I saw my father as he returned from his morning ride, having been called up before daylight to visit a patient in

the country. He immediately walked across the road and spoke to the men. It was always pleasant to me to watch him in his intercourse with his neighbours; there was sure to be a kindly cordial greeting. And now he stood talking for some moments, then walked on up the avenue, and into the side garden.

Just as my mother was becoming impatient for his return he entered, throwing into my lap a bunch of lilacs and laburnums, violets and jonquils, and myrtle—so fresh, so beautiful—and coming from that garden which I had so often longed to see!

“Well, my dear,” said my mother, “what is going to happen?”

“Lady Templar and her daughters return next week.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed my mother. “Well, I hope it will be good for the poor to have the house open again; and I hope my lady’s temper has improved. The Miss Templars are, of course, very accomplished and beautiful? Dear me, what a sensation they will cause!”

In the course of the day several persons called, and the one topic of conversation was the return of the Templars. I heard many half-finished whispered sentences, implying the dread which

Lady Templar's proud bearing inspired. Our old Rector looked grave as he spoke of her, and the late Sir Edward; and his pretty niece, Bessie King, tossed her head as she hoped the young ladies were not like their Gorgon mother, or their boasted beauty would be of little avail.

There were consultations as to the proper way of receiving them, the right day for calling, &c. I was glad to be alone at last in my own room, to consider and realise the news. Florence and Fanny Templar—young, well born, beautiful: how I had dreamt of them! Now they were coming: I should see them!

That day was fated to keep me in continual excitement. There was something in the air itself which I can only describe by using the term intoxicating—and yet that is not the word I want at all: there was in the atmosphere a fulness of pleasure which touched close upon sadness. One could fancy delicious strains of music to be floating about somewhere. Thoughts and fancies seemed to bubble up in abundance, which became oppressive from inability of expression. Silence locked all outlet, as it were. I was restless, idle, excited: now following the heavy flight of the rooks, and longing to be able, like them, to soar into the soft blue

ether; now watching the busy bustle among the smaller birds as they sang and twittered on the boughs.

A sharp, short knock startled me, followed instantaneously by the opening and bang of our street-door. Voices, too!—a shuffling of many steps in the passage—sounds betokening something unusual surely. Hark! there go the church bells! What a peal! Was it for a wedding, or——. A voice calling on my name—a quick, springy step on the stairs—and then my door burst open and one of my brothers called out, “Sister! Captain Sutton!” in a mock pompous voice.

Yes! he had returned, full of honour, full of delight, although his arm was in a sling; and after the first flush of joy, I saw that there were marks of illness and suffering in his face.

There had been a sharp engagement, and he, as acting first lieutenant, had been brought forward by force of circumstances to take up a responsibility not rightfully his. He was successful, and was promoted accordingly; while a severe wound above the elbow, and all his previous anxiety and fatigue, had brought on some kind of fever. The worst was over, and he was sent home, on sick leave, to recruit at Templar Cross.

He was thoroughly at home among us directly; and though his voice was lower and his smile more languid than before, his enjoyment of the home circle was not less vivid and hearty. He preferred delaying his own history, and evidently liked better to listen to our news. What a chatter there was, and the bells sounding their welcome.

The great bit of news, of course, was soon brought up, and he at once seized upon my delight and grand expectations with zest, and joked and rallied me unmercifully about my "romantic ideas." He was quite certain that Florence and Fanny Templar would turn out to be the merest commonplace specimens of fine ladies. Perhaps they would only deign to speak broken English. He had a sailor's prejudice against everything foreign, and rather teased me by mimicking a lady he had met, who thought it very fine to speak bad French; which he assured me would be the way Miss Templar would talk.

He stayed in our house for the first week, that my mother might satisfy her motherly heart as to his own house being quite comfortably ready for him; and even then she would fain have persuaded him that it was very bad for him to be so much alone. But he said we should see only

too much of him, and he had a great desire to take possession and see how it felt to be sole master of a house and garden. He kept his word, and was often with us. As it was the left arm which had suffered, he was able to draw, for which he had considerable taste and liking. He now took the fancy that I could do so if I tried, and that it would be a great resource to me. So my sitting-room was turned into a studio, and I was directed how to sketch ships of all kinds in every position. In the course of these lessons I became quite at home with nautical terms, and the different parts of a ship; and very often the drawing stood still, while he was carried away by memory to give me a heart-stirring account of some action, or some storm.

In all this pleasant and to me new occupation I did not forget to watch the progress of the preparations still carried on opposite, nor did I omit to count the days, and to paint a very complete picture in my own mind of the arrival. But I learnt to keep it all entirely to myself. I was glad that apparently the others had all forgotten the appointed day. I contrived to slip away to my own room, and as Cousin Charles had gone with my father for a long ride into the country, and my mother was busy

superintending the gardener, I had no difficulty in being alone in my watch.

Never did a day pass so slowly as that! Already the sun was sinking, and its light flashed like rubies from the Barton windows. The gate stood wide open. Two or three servants sauntered about in expectation. Then the bells set up a merry peal, with their deep under-tone of sadness. My heart bounded, as, slowly and smoothly, a heavy carriage, drawn by four white horses, came in sight. I just caught a glimpse of one face turned towards me, and then the coach wheeled round and went down the avenue. The lime-trees bent gracefully, as if to give welcome, and the bells—how they rang!

I dreamed all night of Florence Templar.

CHAPTER III.

THE BARTON BELLES.

It was about a fortnight or three weeks after my father's and mother's visit to the Barton, that I was summoned to the parlour. There they stood!

Lady Templar in black velvet, with a string of large pearls round her throat, and a large diamond ring on her forefinger—all grandeur and hardness—curtsying low and stiffly, so as to perplex my poor mother. And there were the girls. I knew Florence at once: I felt that it was her—rich in beauty, tall and stately, her eyes so deep and piercing, her auburn hair falling in rich waves on her shoulders, her lips full of curve and colour. She, too, was cold, even haughty in manner. I never felt so awkward or shy as at that moment: I felt so insignificant in such presence. I remained silent, and Florence turned from me to look round the room. Then a soft musical voice met my ear, and

turning I noticed the other—Fanny Templar; she spoke timidly, but kindly. How delicately pretty she was! with a shy pale brown eye. She was smaller and slighter, and blushed at every word she spoke. But she talked the most; and when they left, my mother was as loud in her praises as she was decided in declaring Lady Templar and Florence to be “unbearable.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “Fanny was very pretty—very lovely;” but the few tones of Florence’s voice had sunk deep into my heart. She had spoken to me on quitting the room, and young and foolish as I was, I was ready to worship her; so completely did her superb and imperial beauty realise my imaginations and dreams. We did not meet again for many weeks; but I watched her from my window.

There was much stir and excitement in the town: dinner-parties and balls given in honour of the Templars. I used to see the sedan-chair, and sometimes caught sight of a face. Then, as the weather became warmer, they walked to the parties: the girls and their brother, Sir Edward, a complete gentleman in appearance, who was now on a visit home. In the depths of the high silk hoods, I often had a glimpse of Florence’s rare and bright smile, or the timid glance of Fanny’s eye.

Then at night, again, the glimmer of the lantern would fall on my window curtains, and I heard the steps on the pavement and the gentlemen's voices; for the Miss Templars were not allowed to walk home unaccompanied. From my cousin Charles I gathered how the evening had passed: how they had been admired and sought for the dance; how repelling Miss Templar could be, and how she gave offence; while Fanny was amiable and pleasing to all: and still my heart clung strangely to the cold one, and longed to possess a magic key to open her heart.

Cousin Charles was, to all appearance, recovered from both wound and fever; yet, for reasons I neither understood nor cared much to sound, he still lingered on. I believe that his ship was "paid off," and that he now awaited the Admiralty's good pleasure to be appointed to another. And since there was some little lull at this time in our naval battles, our sailor was left for some considerable time to test the comparative merits of land and sea.

I found that, as summer weather replaced spring, and as the sling was laid aside, my drawing lessons were less frequent. He took long rambles in the country with his fishing-rod and sketch-book, and through the

latter I became acquainted with many a bridge, or tree, or "pretty bit," I never before had ever heard of. I don't know how it was, but our talks, whether earnest and long, or desultory and trifling, almost always ended in something regarding the Templars. I wanted him to confess Florence's charms; but he found her only cold and statuesque. Fanny might be less regularly a beauty, but she had more of the lovely, gentle woman about her. As for Miss Templar, "no one was good enough for her."

"But about the broken English, and the foreign airs?" I said.

"Oh, I was wrong there, I confess; she is a true English woman: she has not the courtesy of a foreigner."

"Oh, Charles! now you are unjust. How hard you are to please!"

"Not very, little coz," he answered, looking round at me, and letting his pencil drop beside him. "I am always pleased, content to the heart, here in this little snugger. Don't *you*, Jenny, ever learn the manners of a great lady. Society manners, how I abhor them! But I am only a rough sailor, and I dare say my brusque, straightforward ways don't suit ladies in general."

"Next to the idea of my ever attempting to affect

the great lady, that notion of yours amuses me. Why, Cousin Charles, you know my father calls you the lady's pet hero!"

"Pet nonsense! Foolish, laughing, good-natured girls, like the Kings and the Lockys, condescend, for want of a better, to accept me as a partner; but the fact is, Jenny, in the presence of a lady—of a clever, beautiful woman—I am a lout: I have learnt that; whatever nonsensical flattery I swallowed before."

He changed the subject directly; and after that I did not venture so often, or so lightly, on the subject of the Miss Templars to him.

My father occasionally mixed in the society of our neighbourhood; my mother very rarely left home, and I, from my ill-health, lived a very secluded life.

The Templars did not repeat their visit to our house, and I did not meet them; and accordingly it was only through my own observations and conclusions that I was able to gather an insight into their life.

As summer came, there were walking-parties to the woods, and riding-parties to different spots in the neighbourhood. In all of these the Miss Templars joined. I could always see Florence first—often followed by several young men who seemed to be

worshipping her. I thought I could detect scorn in her very tread, full as it was of elasticity and youthful happiness. Fanny walked quietly, and soon at her side there was always *one*; and often I observed those two were a little apart from, and behind, the others.

About this time my father had a wheeled chair made for me, and a kind friend who lived on the opposite side of the street, next to the Barton, gave me leave to be drawn about his garden. This was a great pleasure; but my delight knew no bounds when Lady Templar graciously told my father that she should be glad to see me in their grounds.

There I was drawn about, in those very paths which I had so longed to see; in the famous green walk which was sheltered and private, bordered by a thick belt of trees and shrubs on each side. Periwinkles and primroses formed a carpet under the bushes; woodbines climbed the trees; and here birds sang their sweetest songs.

On rustic benches Florence and Fanny Templar occasionally sat with their books or embroidery. Perhaps they pitied me, or perhaps they saw my fervent admiration. How it was I do not know—but we became friends. Fanny would draw my chair into the shade and sit beside me and talk;

inquiring wonderingly how I endured life, and how I could be happy. She liked to tell me of her pleasant parties, to consult me about her dress: not that I could be of any use in this respect, but it was her nature to like sympathy; and I fancied I could read a world of trial in the hurried movement and shrinking gesture whenever her mother appeared or spoke. Florence's expression, too, grew harder and colder as Lady Templar came in sight.

Florence spoke but little, but sometimes I observed her listening to Fanny and me, though she professed to be reading; and now and then she would carelessly give me a flower—and it was sure to be a choice one. I heard with loving interest all Fanny's troubles, which it seemed a relief to her to pour into my ears: but my thoughts were of Florence—a creature, as it seemed to me, so full of happiness and beauty that she could never need anything from me. The more I felt this the more did I desire to be something to her, but—

“It were all one
That I should love some bright particular star.”

One day Fanny could not join us in the green walk: she had caught a severe cold, her sister

said. I felt uncertain as to whether Florence would like my company, so I told the boy to draw me on. As I returned again to the spot where Florence sat, under a graceful beech-tree, she said hastily—

“Oh, I suppose now Fanny is not here you prefer being drawn up and down.”

Then, as if reading the truth in my face, she added in a softened tone—

“Send your servant away, and sit in the shade for half an hour.”

“Is Fanny very ill?” I asked.

“Yes—no—that is to say, her heart is sick enough;” and I thought Florence laughed scornfully.

“Poor Fanny !” said I.

“Poor? Yes, she is to be pitied: she is fretting about Mr. Chester. Lady Templar” (they always spoke thus of their mother)—“Lady Templar has forbidden her to receive his attentions, and Fanny is attached to him, I believe.”

“And I am sure so is he to her,” I interrupted. “Every one speaks of it. Surely Lady Templar will come round.”

Florence laughed again—a short nervous laugh—

while the rich colour rose high in her exquisite face.

"You don't know Lady Templar! Chester has no chance; and Jenny,"—it was the first time she had called me so—"after all, he is not a man to break one's heart about. *I* never saw one who was!"

"Oh, he is very handsome, very agreeable," said I.

"Handsome?—Yes, he sets off his dress, about which he takes infinite pains, and he dances well, and talks prettily—Poor Fanny!" she added suddenly changing her mocking tone to one that seemed full of suppressed emotion. "Fanny is a timid dove; but counsel her, Jenny, to bear up proudly, and not let the world gaze and pity, and say she is crossed in love. I almost wish when I see her sad face that it could be. But that is impossible! Lady Templar says 'No,' and Fanny's is a spirit to bend under that; even though it should break her heart."

"You would not wish her to disobey her mother?"

"Perhaps not. I would never disobey your mother, Jenny. You must be very happy!"

Led on by this, and her touching change of manner, I talked of myself—the blessings, and the one trial of my life. She listened as if interested, and said she was sorry when my charioteer made his appearance.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TEMPLARS' INHERITANCE.

THERE were many opinions expressed about young Chester and Fanny Templar. Some persons condemned the mother, others thought her quite right, and that it would have been an unequal match.

Fanny was very ill, but Lady Templar forced her into society ; telling her to exert herself, and believing that at her stern bidding she could cease to love. Perhaps, with all her meek and gentle yielding, Fanny secretly hoped. Certain it is, she took her place again in the house, and at parties ; and the bright flush on her cheek deceived many as to the real state of the case. My father said she ought to have been in her bed—he even represented this to Lady Templar. Her answer was—"I had rather see her in the grave, than have it said she was fretting for Chester !"

The young man's father, a determined and independent man, who had saved enough money from his ironmonger's shop to retire and live as a gentleman, took as strong measures as the proud lady. He threatened his son to disown him if he did not at once and for ever give up all thoughts of marrying into a family in which insanity was hereditary: and young Chester sailed for India.

"That poor girl will never see another summer, if Lady Templar suffers her to go out as she does of an evening," remarked my father of Fanny. Nor did she. A cold, caught by being out in a storm of rain when riding, soon compelled Lady Templar to send for my father, and in his face I read that there was no hope.

"Her heart is broken, I do believe," said my mother.

"Her lungs are diseased, wife," answered my father, "which is more to the purpose: it is hereditary."

"My opinion, however," said my mother, "is that Fanny would have been in a very different state, had her mother not driven off poor Chester."

"Hem!—I don't know; at all events she is going fast, though even now the mother will see no danger."

It was strange how Lady Templar persisted in asserting, perhaps in believing, that if Fanny would exert herself she would be better. She answered all inquiries by saying, "It was nothing but a bad cold."

"Poor Fanny Templar!" exclaimed Cousin Charles one morning, after sitting some time silent and looking very sad. "I can hardly realize that one so young, so lovely—lately so active and bright—is so near her end as your father supposes. Jenny! Jenny! surely it can't be anything so dreadful?" he added in an agitated, appealing voice. I could only shake my head. His manner and look surprised me. I did not know he had so keen an interest in, or thought so very much of her.

"Good God! what a trial—what a loss!" he continued, rising and pacing the room the while.

"I did not know that you admired—that you cared so very much about her," I remarked; and I felt at the time that my voice was cold and unsympathizing.

He stopped and looked at me for a moment, and then resumed his walk.

"Who could help caring?" he presently said. "Why, Jenny, just imagine what a loss such a

gentle presence must be in that household. To her mother—to her sister—so much together. I wonder, does Dr. Wilson—does your father imagine the disease can be given to another? I thought her so thin, so worn the other day.”

“Who is thin?—you have not seen Fanny very lately?”

“No, no: Florence—Miss Templar. Haven’t you observed that she is altered, Jenny?”

“She is fagged and anxious, I know. She is deeply attached to her sister, though it is the fashion to say she has no heart or feeling,” I answered with a little anger.

“Deeply attached! yes, you are right. Strong affections, not easily or quickly won; but steadfast and deep. And what a blow—what a loss it will be to her! She will surely sink under it.”

“I think not,” I answered. “Florence has great strength of mind, and immense power of self-control. She is hardly one to sink under any trial; on the contrary, she will rise above and with it.”

“You do her justice, Jenny; you have always read her truly. It is a noble nature—far above the power of common appreciation. She is fond of you. You are happy, little coz, for you will have it in your power to console—to comfort her.”

Here our conversation was interrupted by others coming into the room. But it gave me quite a new subject for thought.

Weeks passed: and I was watching the first snowstorm one early winter evening, when a note was brought to me. A few hurried, illegible lines from Florence, telling me that her watching had ended, and entreating me to come to her directly.

I found her alone in her room. She threw her arms around me passionately, sobbing, though without tears, "O Jenny, Jenny! it is hard: she is gone—she has left me alone. Good Fanny! gentle sister! O my God! why did she die?" Then in a suppressed, agitated voice, she added, "All for him, too! She was never herself after that. But she said nothing about it—made no complaint; for which I honour her. It shall never be whispered over tea-tables, that a Templar died because she loved in vain; particularly—pshaw! it is madness to think of it even—particularly after—Jenny, you know what they said? That old Chester—no!" How proud, how determined she looked, as she drew herself up and said, "Fanny Templar died of consumption—consumption! one

of our inheritances. But she ought not to have left me: she knows I had only her to love. O Fanny! you should have struggled against it for my sake."

I cannot describe to you the infinitely touching pathos of her voice as she said these last words. But it passed: haughtiness, coldness, tenderness—all flitted over her one after the other, as clouds rapidly obscure the sun.

Before I left her that evening, she was again shut up in that beautiful but cold case of marble—I know not what else to call it—for Lady Templar had come in for a moment, and her presence always froze her children. To the casual observer it would seem that Fanny was soon forgotten. Her name was not mentioned in her home. Everything that had been hers was carefully moved out of sight—her place was not known.

The winter was again extremely severe—it was very much in earnest in those days; there was no playing at cold weather—it was very real. I was a prisoner to my room, and saw nothing of Florence for some time.

But one day there came a hurried knock at our door, and to my joy she was ushered in. I could

see at once that she was agitated. After a few common-place words absently spoken, she exclaimed, "Oh, I am so miserable! Edward—my brother is here; and—and—he now wants to marry, and she won't consent. Strife—strife and storms—nothing else! and, Jenny, I *am* so lonely. Sometimes I think I will marry too, and have a home of my own; it would give me something to do at least; she would not say nay to that, at all events."

"I did not know, Florence, that you were attached to any one."

"Attached, indeed! nor am I. I never saw the man yet I could love! You stare, Jenny, and think me very stony-hearted and very wicked. Perhaps I am the first; but, however, I don't think I am yet wicked enough to marry in that fashion, though I do not know what I may be driven to by and by, unless things mend. Oh, you don't know how drear that house is! But I am not a coward! Only sometimes I think of old Chester's sneer at us. You know what I mean!"

She whispered close to my ear, and looked at me in an excited way.

"We have little inducement to offer; but I wish you would come here sometimes, Florence."

"Ah, I wish I could! But I am not allowed. Your father has angered Lady Templar."

"But you used to be so gay, and see so many people," I put in.

"Used I? Yes! but—no Jenny, we do brave our sorrow as it is; yet the severe frost has been kindly in placing a bar on visiting as yet. How snug your room looks! Why, Jenny, can't *you* come to me?"

"Gladly," I replied, "when not wanted by my mother. But I am able to help her now in sewing, and attending to my sick brother."

Florence sighed deeply.

"Ah, you have a place, I see, and I have none! How many people want you! Captain Sutton, your cousin—you see a great deal of him, don't you? However, I must go now!" she added, before I had time to reply. In leaving, she slipped a ring into my hand.

"No, Florence; I cannot take so valuable a thing!"

"Yes, you must; you must not refuse, I tell you: it is *her* hair." And she rushed out of the room—leaving a tear on my face as she hastily kissed me.

Yes, here it is! I always wear it—the lock of

fair soft hair, and the initials F. T. The pearls are fit types of Fanny, as these sparkling diamonds are of Florence.

Ah, Florence! Florence!

CHAPTER V.

NEWS FROM THE EAST.

NOTWITHSTANDING Florence's wish, that I should go sometimes to see her, and my own strong desire, circumstances prevented my doing so often. I could not walk; it was not always convenient to have the chair. The frost and snow still continued severe, and we had an invalid in the house. My little brother had the measles severely, and he was never pleased if I left him for long together.

There was much sickness about, and my father was continually out, braving the weather in his own cheerful way.

I heard but little of the Templars, and saw still less.

It was rather a dull and melancholy season—at least it seemed so for both ourselves and for the Barton party.

Sir Edward neither brought nor left any bright-

ness. His coming and going were equally sudden; and while here, no one in the town seemed to see him. Visitors were denied, and all invitations refused. According to the gossip—which somehow is always furnished with facts, true or false, or perhaps usually a little of both, “founded on fact,” as they say—Sir Edward departed in great anger, having altogether failed in the object of his visit. Certainly a darker shadow fell on his lady mother’s brow; while her bearing was, if possible, higher and haughtier than ever.

Cousin Charles was away during part of this time. He went to visit some friends in his old home, and also to pay his respects to the Admiralty, and show himself as still alive and eligible for service. He exacted a promise from me before he left—to write full particulars of ourselves and all our friends. But I never found such difficulty before in filling a sheet, so as to make it worth postage. Vainly I worked my brains for news. I saw no one; and was really half ashamed to repeat the rumours about Lady Templar and her son. This part of my letter, however, gained more notice than almost any other; although he did not forget due sympathy with my health bulletins, and sent funny messages to make my brother laugh.

He remarked strongly on the worldliness of parents who do not scruple to destroy their children's happiness for a mere shadow. Why should not poor Sir Edward marry the woman he loved? Had he not "family" and all that, enough to raise and ennoble his wife, even if she were a grade below him? Was she not a gentlewoman, though poor? And where was the disgrace? &c., &c. Then he had somewhere seen a picture, wonderfully like poor Fanny; so much so, that he almost determined to buy it, and, had he dared to do such a thing, to offer it to her family—for he had heard they had not even a sketch of her sweet face.

Thought I to myself, certainly Cousin Charles thinks a very great deal about these Templars. I don't think he can have the face to joke me any longer on my friendship and "adoration" as he pleases to term it.

I was glad we should think alike. It would be a real triumph if I could ever hear him confess he truly admired Florence, and that I had been right in my reading of her character.

Spring came at last. Very late it was, and very welcome. Florence and her mother laid aside their mourning, and once more appeared among their friends. There was also company at the Barton.

The coming and going of carriages and sedan-chairs made our street quite alive again, and my brother was amused to look out on them from my window till he was allowed to go out himself.

Florence seemed to recover her wonted brilliancy and brightness; though in her unrestrained intercourse with me—when we did meet—I sometimes saw that she was not happy at home. How could she be?

In society she was the star—the queen—commanding devoted admiration; but no one seemed to touch her heart—and yet there was one!

Then came the news that Sir Edward had dared to brave his mother, and had actually married a pretty woman of low connections. Lady Templar had vowed, that if he did so, she would never see him or speak of him; that she would disinherit him of all the property over which she had power—and it was considerable.

She fainted when she heard the news. His picture was removed from the dining-room to a lumber-closet, and from that hour she never alluded to him: yet he had been her favourite—Florence had said the only *loved* child!

The mother's attention now seemed wholly turned to Florence: dresses, jewels, everything she could

wish for was lavished upon her; and Lady Templar's dark eye was seen to kindle with pride—if not with love—as she saw her child's beauty, and noted its effect on others. It seemed as if all her pride, all her hope was centred in her. She opened her doors to visitors, gave balls and dinners, and made the old house busy and lively.

It amused me not a little to see the means used, and the infinite trouble taken, by the very persons who had been most ready to find fault with the Templars, to get invited to the weekly parties. Our little parlour was sometimes besieged by people, coaxing, begging, clamouring, for “dear Mrs. Wilson,” or “excellent Dr. Wilson,” just to get them invited. It was in vain to disclaim all influence or power; useless to say that her ladyship had taken offence at some plain speaking of my father's, and that therefore, even if he were sufficiently intimate, his word would rather go against them: they were quite sure Lady Templar would do anything for my father. She had been heard to speak of him in high terms; and was not her daughter, proud and reserved as she was to every one else, quite a bosom friend of Miss Wilson's? &c., &c., &c.

And it was true that I was a great deal with

Florence—that she sought my company, and even showed me affection. Those quiet hours which I spent with her in the Barton grounds, or sometimes in her own room, taught me to love her more and more: it was worship! I have since thought it strange how this feeling grew and increased, even though I have learnt, in some measure, to trace the reason. At the time, I neither did nor could scrutinize the depth or measure, nor the circumstances which might possibly have given impetus to the admiration she inspired me with.

And my wish was granted. Cousin Charles—Captain Sutton, the brave sailor, the provoking, scoffing infidel—had lowered his colours and given in, even to the utmost article of my own creed. It was my turn now, and I used my power without stint or mercy. He was a captive, a very slave in chains—a beggar, fain to sue for alms at a distance; while I was courted, and favoured, and received words and smiles which I knew he envied and grudged to me.

“At last—at last, then, you think her handsome,” I said with triumph one morning, after hearing his account of a gay dance, and his disappointment in not finding her once disengaged during the whole evening.

" Handsome! ridiculous, Jenny! You know I never denied her beauty; but handsome is not the term."

" Pretty, then; does that suit better?"

" Nonsense! Bessie King is pretty, if you will. I tell you, though there were many good looking girls in the room—ay, very pretty girls—not one of the whole kit was worthy to hold her fan. By Jupiter! how she manages that same ornament. I hate a fan in general—it seems to make women such flirts and coquettes, they can never be still; always furling and unfurling, and whisking it and wriggling, whispering some scandal behind it. But to see her! so still—that indubitable mark of a well-bred lady; no fidgets, no unmeaning simpers, no trick of the fingers or feet; so calm, so regal; the fan, a very rare and costly one too it is, lying still, unless there be real reason for using it, and then it is done so slowly, so gracefully. And when she does smile—which is rarely, I grant—it comes so slow, and yet seems to curl and brighten every feature, and long after, the light remains deep down in her eyes. That's what I call a real smile, with expression and meaning in it. Hey! little coz, have you noticed this peculiarity in her?"

" Occasionally," I answered drily. " But, as you

observed just now, it is rare; and perhaps I am not so favoured as my cousin, Captain Sutton."

"Oh, by Nep! you are severe, little Jenny. I have considered myself a lucky fellow, on the whole, all my life, but," and he shrugged his shoulders and sighed and frowned, "I have not been so lucky as all that. No, no; frowns and scornful curls of the rosy lips; or at best, low, meaning bows, enough to chill all one's blood and forget one's moorings; that's the fare I get, little coz."

After a little while he began again.

"However, I don't despair. My motto is always 'Persevere—try again.' It has served me many and many a time, when I thought all was over, and the fickle wench Fortune had left Charlie Sutton for ever; but I won her smiles again, and why not those of a real flesh and blood woman? Do you see any reason why I should despair—you little wisdom, with your pale, thoughtful face there? I wonder what you were thinking of then, Jenny, with your earnest eyes fixed, as you know so well how to fix them; just as they say the mermaids do when they delude poor tars into the deep waters. Are you aware what a curious trick you have?—nay, never colour up: I meant no blame. It is a very pleasant trick, though it does make one

feel queer once now and then, and wonder if the little thing is mortal, or something more. Ah, Jenny, if you are gifted in any way, why can't you win one of those same smiles for me? You and I are staunch friends, I believe. I flatter myself, with all your romantic friendship, and all your home love, there is still a little piece in your heart made over to a certain sailor cousin. You would grant me my wish if you could, wouldn't you, Jenny?"

"Yes, Charles, I would: you are right," was my answer, as he took my hand in both his. I did not look at him again, for I felt strangely moved, and it needed great effort to appear as usual. Presently he dropped my hand, stooped and kissed my forehead, and then hastily left the room.

It was very long ere we had another such an intimate talk. But he acted up to his motto, and by the time summer was well settled in, Charles had become a pretty constant guest at the Barton, and, as it seemed, certainly a welcome one to the mother.

Lady Templar had a weakness in favour of personal beauty, it was said; her keen admiration of it sometimes led her out of her usual course, as if she was drawn on unconsciously or involuntarily—fascinated by a magnetic power, which, for the time,

was even stronger than her own will and pride. And Charles Sutton was beautiful! though I believe it is not considered an appropriate term to use for a man; yet some men are so, and there is a manly type of beauty as well as a womanly; so I must be allowed to use it with reference to him. Then his manner was so frank and honest—a little occasional bluntness of speech was so softened by his smile, half roguish and saucy, half appealing and tender. Most women liked him, and recognised in him woman's want—a stalwart arm, ready and willing to protect and uphold with gentleness: that would win an infant to sleep peacefully and at once on his bosom.

When he pleased, he could be very amusing in society, but I heard that he was strangely uncertain about it now, and was often provokingly silent and grave.

Not even Lady Templar's marked attention and welcome always roused him to be gay and agreeable.

From being the most indefatigable dancer in the room, he often chose to be merely a spectator; and once or twice, to the great disgust of all the young ladies, and the amusement of a few elders, he actually joined the card-tables, and turned his back on the dance, though more than one comely girl

had to act the gentleman to another belle, so much were good gentleman-partners at a premium.

The fact was, though he had gained the mother's courteous welcome as a guest, he was nearly as far as ever from what he desired. Florence did not mean to be a coquette, I am sure. But she could not always resist his simple, earnest greeting; and one gracious word, or a bow less formal than usual, was enough to put him into a flutter of hope; while at another moment he was utterly cast down by a tone of careless indifference in her address.

He would linger about in her neighbourhood—within reach of her voice, though not addressed to him—gazing and listening in silence; or he would rouse himself and remember his best stories, and hit on his happiest sayings for her benefit. But in general all would not do. She either saw his admiration and repulsed it, or she was unconscious and indifferent. Sometimes her coldness made him angry—even bitter; and he told me he believed firmly she had no heart at all—that she was only a marble statue. At other times she was a finished coquette and flirt—yes, even though her fan played no part in it. He would have nothing more to do with her. She was not worth a plain and honest man's trouble. She would learn that such scorn

could bring its own punishment. It was meet and right for her to receive a lesson now and then.

And the interpretation of this was—so I heard from others—that once or twice, when utterly provoked, and her repelling coldness and haughtiness challenged him to try his strength, Charles had persisted in asking her for so many dances that she was driven to say, “I don’t intend to dance at all this evening, Captain Sutton;” and he thus prevented her from dancing with another, if she would not with him. It was a mistake on his part. Such like passages at arms, or trials of strength, did not suit Florence’s temper. After such occurrences she came less to see me; fewer notes came begging me to join her in the shrubbery.

I attributed this, in some measure, to Charles’ conduct, and her evident determination to avoid meeting him; for she knew how constantly he was with us, and she was quite aware that I was fond of him, and now and then had ventured indirectly to take his part and plead his cause. Yet there were times when she certainly led to the subject, or, at all events, was not unwilling to pursue it. I have seen her listen to my account of his early life and conduct with downcast eyes and grave

pondering brow, while she moved her pretty foot to and fro, as if drawing with it on the gravel—a way she had now and then when interested. Sometimes I thought he would at last succeed, and that she was not always displeased at heart with his fervent, unbounded devotion, for such it was; and, with all his rebuffs, it grew from day to day, and seemed as if, from its very intensity, it must find its answer.

Perhaps it was too evident. It would have been better could he have restrained and hidden it; for I fancy that a woman, after all, better loves to worship than to be worshipped.

But I must leave Florence and Charles, to speak of an event which changed many things.

At the other end of the town from that in which stood the Barton and my home, shut in with a wall, and high doors or gates, was a quiet, pleasant house—the residence of a Mr. and Mrs. Graham. They had long lived there, in great seclusion and dignified poverty. They were respected in the town—not only on their own account, but from the name they bore.

The Grahams had been an important family in the neighbourhood, and formerly were in possession of large estates; but from some cause or other, the

last generation had become impoverished, and the family estates—even the old mansion, called the Grange—were sold to different purchasers; and some fine timber—the pride of the country—was all cut down unsparingly. The elder branch of the family passed away and disappeared; only occasionally the Mr. and Mrs. Graham, who led quiet lives in the town, were heard to allude to a nephew—the only remaining representative of the head line—a strange lad, so they said, who had declared, after the example of another hero, he would yet live to redeem the fine property of which he might have been heir. He and his widowed mother lived far away, and only once had he visited the neighbourhood, when a very young child. Years passed. The mother was dead, and the lad had become a distinguished and rising man in that then golden field for adventurous and speculative spirits—India. •

Quiet, gray Mr. Graham, or rather, to use his rightful title, Mr. Richard Graham, was greatly stirred one day this summer by receiving a letter from his nephew, in which he said that he had not forgotten his boyish vow, but abided by his early wish, and was ready and prepared to return to the home of his fathers, and if he could do so, even

at a sacrifice, to buy back the Grange estate and settle himself there.

Great was the joy and pride of all who remembered and still regretted the reign of the Grahams. Our loyal little town stirred itself, and held deep consultations, and convened public meetings, in order to give a worthy welcome to such a hero. A Graham at the Grange again! The very idea gave a stimulus to trade. There was no difficulty apprehended as to the re-purchase, since it had been the property of a farmer only, on whom the merits of the ancient house were thrown away; and who, for a bonus, would gladly sell and settle elsewhere. The other estates were not so easily to be had, for they had been divided among divers hands; but if the Grange could be had entire, the rest might be waited for in patience. Already young and flourishing trees had sprung up on the ashes of their grand old ancestors, and a little judicious planting and clearing of fences, with some trifling repairs, would render the Grange fit to receive the rightful master. Small groups gathered in the market-place, or lingered in the churchyard after service, to talk over the event. Everyone pronounced in favour of the young man. His love for the home of his ancestors did him credit,

and his unfailing perseverance and steady pursuance of this one object bespoke no ordinary character.

Then he was a Nabob! Expectation and speculation were on tip-toe. A Nabob!—what did not that term imply? Nothing less than chests full of golden moidores and rupees; while a great many simple folks believed—with wonder and awe—that he would be accompanied by a train of black slaves, in white turbans and flowing robes, everyone wearing precious jewels. It was thought, in our town, that gold lay like stones in the fields of India. Our old nurse was heard to inform our housemaid, that gentlemen who came from India had all their coat-buttons of solid gold, and that they lived on some curious hot and spiced dish in which gold-dust was one of the ingredients—the which diet had the effect of making them all as yellow as any guinea. Young ladies grew nervous and anxious. I heard from good authority, that the pretty Miss Kings were caught in the act of new-trimming their hats. The drapers ordered new ribbons and dresses; the china man displayed a great number of flaring plates and mugs, with “Welcome home!” inscribed; while our spirited stationer, not to be outdone, stuck prints of elephants and tiger hunts in his window; and the grocer—a very fat, sleepy man—yawned, and

opened his eyes, when he heard the neighbours say they lived on rice in "them furrin parts;" and he ordered down at once a bag of rice, and stuck a paper in his window, in the best copy-book writing of the parish clerk and schoolmaster, stating the fact that "the best genuine Indian rice was sold within."

Small tea-parties were made up; and while macaroons and tea-cakes, coffee and cream disappeared, the colour of Mr. Graham's eyes and hair were settled, his height, and even the shape of his nose was guessed at. Even Florence condescended to hope that he would not turn out a "yellow faced wretch with a liver complaint!"

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Graham were asked out every day in the week, in contradiction to their habits of many years; and since they refused, on the plea of never going out, being old and invalided, they were beset with morning callers, who questioned closely as to all they knew of their wonderful nephew. All this must have been embarrassing to the worthy couple. Mrs. Graham hesitated, and said simply "that really she had only seen her nephew once, and did not then remark anything particular in him. His father had been a very handsome man in his day, and his mother quite a beauty. She did not know if Gordon was like

them, or if he was clever; but now she thought of it, his letters were rather sensible;" and she appealed to her husband for his opinion. He gave it—not without a sly and amused smile, accompanied by his old-fashioned courtly bow.

"Certainly he should not hesitate to give it as his opinion that his nephew Gordon had good sense, and a clear, far-seeing head. It was a very proper thing indeed of him, now that he had some rupees, and wished for a home, to return where apparently his nest was so well feathered. All this kindly interest was a great honour to the whole family, of which he himself was a poor and insignificant member; but he felt in some degree included, &c. He could only hope that the Nabob might prove deserving and grateful, &c."

After which speech his wife again chimed in—"I am sure he has a good heart. He proved that by sending me that beautiful Indian shawl by Captain What's-his-name—dear me! how many years ago? However, it was far too good for me to wear; so I have kept it carefully wrapped up in calico, with plenty of peppercorns and camphor, to guard against moths: so he will see how I have valued and prized it, and perhaps—what do *you* say, Mr. Graham? Do you think it will be a

proper compliment to pay, if I just put it on, you know, to receive him?—of course I should not wear it long, or injure it at all.”

“Put it on by all means, my dear; I dare say our nephew has a better one to wrap his feet in. By the by, among all the provisions made for welcoming him by the worthy townsfolk, have they thought of a *very* large stock of coal and wood? All Nabobs shiver. My dear, be sure you have our coal-cellar quite full, and an unlimited supply of kindlers. By the way, a bonfire would be a very appropriate way of celebrating the arrival of this hero: he and his servants might then keep warm, while receiving the congratulations of the people.”

“Dear me! Shiver in summer! Well, well!—how very strange. But do you think, Mr. Graham, he will come to our house? How shall we find room to accommodate him?”

I believe this last doubt, which it amused her husband to keep alive, very much qualified Mrs. Graham's pleasure in the idea of her nephew's return. I knew that she privately consulted my mother as to feather-beds and blankets, and was extremely relieved to learn, on his arrival at Southampton—from which place he wrote to fix the day for coming to Templar Cross—that his

intention was to take rooms at the inn; and he commissioned his uncle to secure a bed for him.

A bed!—one bed only!—The landlord and landlady of the Golden Lion were all astonishment and wonder.

“Did he say only one bed, sir—are you sure?”

“He says one bed for himself and one for his servant. So you see, Mrs. Long, Nabobs are like Englishmen in some of their habits, and only require one bed to sleep in,” said the facetious old uncle.

A procession was arranged to meet him at the boundary of the parish. The Mayor and Corporation, the Rector, and any volunteers that chose, and the two schools—the Charity and the Bluecoat—in Sunday array, and with ribbons in their hats—on which was printed by enterprising young ladies, “Welcome,” in large and fanciful letters. A very old woman, who had known his grandfather, and worked as laundress at the Grange, was to present him with a very big, very gay nosegay. The dinner, for which there was a goodly list of subscribers, was to be given him after he was settled and recovered from his voyage.

Alas for human propositions!—even when arranged by a mayor, justice, and corporation. Alas for the curtsey which old Dame Wilkins had been privately

rehearsing before the parish clerk—a very important personage, by the way, in all these shows, and whose word was law, and taste indisputable. Alas for all that goodly company who, intent on hospitable doings, trudged forth on the dusty road, on a melting broiling day!—which seemed sent on purpose to suit our East Indian.

They waited two full hours on the highway; one or two small children fainted, several dropped down, overcome with sleep, and could not be roused to “stand in order,” even at the bidding of the clerk. Aldermen in flaming scarlet robes, and burgesses in black, were fain to use their pocket-handkerchiefs as if they were mops. The patient Rector grew tired, and fancied he remembered having heard that East-Indians were never punctual, and consulted his watch again and again, comparing it with the Mayor’s, and thereupon branching off into a discussion on some new inventions in watch machinery. Dame Wilkins sighed over her fast-fading flowers, and sat as quiet and patient as she could, on a tree-stump near at hand, trying to think of the honour instead of the fatigue of the place assigned her in the day’s proceedings—when all at once out struck the bells—the Templar Cross church bells! Glances of mute inquiry were interchanged; the clerk shook the

sleeping babes fiercely, and wondered what the ringers could be at. The Mayor, being a tall man, climbed the hedge, to see if perchance the carriage was in sight, and had been descried by the sharp eyes stationed to give notice in the belfry; but no carriage came along the road, which lay stretched out for a long way in sight; and still and more merrily rang the bells.

“Can he have taken another road?” was gently insinuated by the Rector.

“Impossible!”—“Very likely!”—“Certainly not!”—and “Oh, of course!” jumbled together, and after a confusion of tongues like that at Babel’s tower, it was agreed the procession should “form and return the way by which it came.” Wearily, and with very parched throats, they turned towards home, and on the road thither a messenger met them with the pleasant tidings that Mr. Graham had arrived by the other road, and was now in the large room at the Golden Lion; but Mr. Long ventured to suggest that the procession should assemble before the inn, and that Mr. Graham should appear on the balcony to receive the welcome they had intended to honour him with. As there was nothing better to be done, under the circumstances, it was agreed upon.

• Meanwhile, we who had stayed at home and were stationed at windows, had seen a neat new travelling carriage and four pass swiftly by—not, however, so swiftly but that I could see and ascertain the fact, that Mr. Gordon Graham was not yellow, and that he had a black servant by his side.

The bells did their duty well. How sweetly they must have sounded to the ears of the stranger! It was pleasant to sit and listen to their tale—for they did seem to tell one—now dying away so softly, now clashing out with renewed vigour.

Long before the procession arrived I had returned to my own window, and again I fancied the old lime-trees bowed cheerily to the bell-music, scattering as they did so their golden tribute of leaves. While gazing in my dreamy fashion I saw Cousin Charles come up the road. He kissed his hand at me, and then ran across and up-stairs to tell me, in his pleasant way, how the tired and dusty corporation and school-boys had drawn up in front of the Golden Lion, and the Mayor stammered out as good a speech as a tired and thirsty throat would permit; that the “*little*” Nabob had appeared in the balcony, and bowed and smiled very graciously, especially at the croaking cheer got up per order of the clerk,

by the tired little boys; how he had won all hearts, by ordering out beer and buns for the mob, and invited Mr. Mayor, &c., and the Rector to come in and share his luncheon. That on being told of Dame Wilkins's intention regarding the nosegay, and her mortification at the disappointment, he carried with his own hands a glass of wine to the old lady, and to the delight of the schoolboys—now alive and awake again, under the influence of beer and buns—he had kissed the Dame's wrinkled cheek, and made her as low a bow as ever was given to his Majesty.

"In fact, he has already won golden opinions and spent golden guineas at the Golden Lion, and means to be a very popular character," laughed Charles, and then away he went again; and I watched his gay hopeful step as he entered the Barton gates, and wondered if the new comer was half so handsome or so well made.

As he walked up the avenue, a solitary rook, rising and cawing in a peculiar way, startled me. It seemed to wing itself in a circle round Charles's head. The bells ceased to ring at that moment, and ended in the monotone they usually descend to after a full peal; and the wind suddenly rising, brought down a shower of leaves, and seemed to

shiver with a whispering moan though the trees; while a dark cloud overshadowed the sun. I caught sight of my ring with the fair hair, and the remembrance of poor Fanny struck me sharply and with pain. I shuddered and shivered.

The day had turned, and all at once became chill and dark. I felt moody and melancholy. Perhaps the unusual excitement and stir, added to the bells, which always had a strange power over me, had been a little too much for my quiet and secluded habits. I was glad to leave my room and seek the parlour. It looked cheerful and pleasant, I remember, as I entered: the tea-things on the table, and my mother intent on keeping some hot cake for my father, looking so pretty, as she always did—such a trim little woman—with a *piquante* expression which was very fascinating to every one.

A chair was instantly placed for Jenny; and whatever might sometimes steal over my mind of sorrow, or repining, or of “dismal fancy,” it was sure to vanish under the kindly influences of this home circle.

And now where are they all? My brothers—fine, handsome, promising lads—my mother—my father! I alone left: I the weakest—the withered

bud—alone left, of all that was then so blooming
and fair! Rather let me say, they being ready
are gone home, and in God's good time I shall
follow.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NABOB'S FEAST.

AFTER a very short time the purchase of the Grange estate was completed. There was no difficulty made by Mr. Graham on the score of price, and, therefore, none by the farmer in giving it up. And now nothing would satisfy our worthy town-folk but a public rejoicing to celebrate the event.

People subscribed handsomely — Mr. Graham himself munificently; and a dinner was to be given to the poor in the square, or centre of the town, ushered in by games, such as out-hurling and wrestling; and a bull was baited—the last ever seen in our town! All to conclude with a dance on the green, to which everyone was bidden; all classes to enjoy and rejoice together for once.

My fingers were not idle: I embroidered flags, on which were sundry mottoes, and the arms of the Grahams repeated in every possible form. Then

there were evergreens to be arranged, and in *this* Florence assisted me—while my mother was in an agony to do credit to *her* share of plum-puddings and cakes, everyone supplying a given quantity.

“What a fuss it is!” said Florence, smiling over her work, and constantly bewailing her want of skill and praising mine.

“Mr. Gordon Graham is much to be envied, I think,” remarked Cousin Charles; for he was with us, helping my boy brothers to cut the greens. “I wonder if he is aware how the young ladies are staining and pricking their fingers to do him honour!”

“Not to do *him* honour,” said Florence, “but all the poor hungry souls who are bidden to a feast once in a way. It is for them *I* work, at all events!”

I protested against this. I said the beef and pudding was for them, but the ornamental part was all for him. He was worthy of honour; having resolutely battled against poverty and difficulties, and now having returned to spend his fortune in a little obscure place, I admired him.

Charles and Florence both laughed, and I observed that there was a glow on his face as she merrily asked him to cut an obstinate twig for her.

He did not do it quickly or skilfully; as she held it out, his hands trembled.

"Have you seen Mr. Graham yet?" I asked.

"No, the pleasure is to come. To-morrow, of course, he will appear. I hear he is to open the ball with Miss Long, of the Golden Lion," said Charles.

"A very popular proceeding," said I.

"We are all expected to do our duty, Miss Templar. May I hope for the honour of the first dance?"

"Oh, I don't know—really, Captain Sutton—I don't know that I shall dance: perhaps Lady Templar will not like it," and she rose from her seat, quickly adding, "Jenny, I am tired of the work! I think I shall go and see how Mrs. Wilson gets on with the puddings."

She left the room, and Charles looked blank enough!

"Never mind, Charles; she will dance with you," I said.

"To be sure," exclaimed one of the boys. "She knows who is the best dancer, and the handsomest fellow; but I heard the Mayor say," he added importantly, "that Mr. Graham was to begin with Miss Templar—so perhaps that is what she is thinking of."

A glorious day was granted for our fête. I was drawn to a friend's house, where the windows commanded a view of the tables, which were spread in the town, and to which hundreds of people were marshalled in a kind of procession headed by a band of music. What a buzz of voices there was!—bells ringing out wildly above all, drowning the horns, flutes, and fiddles.

Then there was a hush—a pause, and our Rector mounted on the centre table. I was too far off to hear, but I saw his gesture, and the men's hats were off in a moment. A blessing being asked, the business began. Gentlemen carving and serving their poorer brethren—mothers handing over slices of pudding to the children who could not find sitting room—all eating—talking amid the clashing of plates—while the flags waved overhead, and the old weathercock on the steeple glittered in the bright sun.

But the prettiest scene was in the evening on the green, from whence a rich and varied view was commanded—with the river winding below us, by dark woods, and quiet fields; while crowds of gay folks poured in, and the band set up a lively strain.

I looked eagerly for the hero of the day. At last

my father pointed him out as he passed, deep in consultation with the Mayor as to farther proceedings.

A short man—not little, as Charles had said, for the head and shoulders were large and square. He seemed to have accidentally taken up a wrong pair of legs—so out of proportion were they to the rest of his figure.

“How plain!” I could not help exclaiming—but not insignificant: no, as he came nearer I saw that his tread had power and authority in it. He was close by me, speaking to my father—looking at me.

I literally shrank from his gaze, so searching was it. The whole face was made of expression; every curl of the mouth told its tale; and the eyes!—how shall I describe them? Gray, and with scarcely any eyebrow or eyelash to shade or soften their deep and keen expression. Yet were they soft, and the most striking I have ever seen; not being an index to his own mind, as some eyes are, though while he talked their very hue changed. His forehead was good, broad, and well shaped. His voice—I could have listened for ever to it; so clear, so modulated, so musical in its power!

He was talking of whom he ought to select as a partner for the opening dance. I listened with

eagerness ; I saw him glance towards Lady Templar and Florence. Perhaps I was sorry for Charles ; but I thought Florence ought to be the one. My father mentioned the Rector's daughter, Bessie King ; and the Mayor, 'after some hesitation, seemed to approve.

"Mr. Wilson's daughter, for I believe it is his daughter I have the pleasure of seeing, hardly agrees in her father's decision," Mr. Graham said, bowing and fixing his strange eyes on me. I coloured and felt confused, as I looked anywhere but at him, wondering how he could see into my heart.

"For myself," he continued in his mellow tones, "myself, I should have fancied also that Miss Templar had the best claim ; but I submit to authority — civic authority," bowing to the Mayor.

How extraordinary ! "Also !" How could he divine that I *also* was thinking of Florence ?

I saw Mr. Graham and Miss King as they reached the bottom of the formidable dance, having conscientiously, as he afterwards said, danced down every couple. His partner was very pretty, and a sweet dancer. She was in excited spirits, I thought, as she took her place at the bottom of

the long row, near where I was sitting in my wheel-chair beside my mother.

The next couple who came tripping down—so lightly, so smoothly, that they scarcely seemed to touch the ground—attracted the approving notice of the bystanders. My father could not resist moving in time to the lively tune as he watched them.

“Ha! a pretty pair that,” he said. “Well done, Charlie!”

“How graceful she is!” murmured my mother. “Ah, she has not the spirit of Bessie King, though; she skips eight or ten couple.”

“Hard work on the grass, Aunt,” said Charles, as he came near for an instant; but he stayed not for an answer. It was the talking time—the moment when partners might exchange words: he was at her side, bending down to her; while Mr. Graham, being again opposite, instead of by Miss King, had time to look round. I was not surprised to see his keen eyes fixed on Florence, so beautiful did she seem then.

That dance over, Florence found a seat by me, and professing herself quite tired, refused to dance any more; though Charles said he had been cheated out of half the dance, and hung about her and called for her favourite tunes. All to no purpose; she

would talk to me and not to him; and he moved away.

Mr. Graham did his part in asking the young ladies; but he, too, was tired at last; and my father, seeing him approach, offered him his chair.

One glance round, which seemed to take in who was there, and everything about us, and he whispered something to my father.

The next instant I heard my father introduce him to Miss Templar, and he was seated by us.

"I am glad you are not disposed to dance any more. I am myself no adept in the art; but I had been looking forward to seeing Miss Templar disengaged, that I might crave the honour—the pleasure of an introduction. 'This is, however, more to my taste.'"

At this moment, Charles and Agnes King flew by us—the gay young girl insisting on going even beyond the long array of couples.

"That is worth seeing," remarked Mr. Graham; "he is fit to be a dancing-master: a desirable partner, I should think. Is he the beau, pray, of Templar Cross; and is she—who is the belle, Miss Wilson? Won't you enlighten my ignorance?"

"That depends upon taste," I answered, still avoiding his eyes, and not pleased at his speech.

"Present company always excepted, of course," he added. And on looking up I saw his eyes riveted on Florence, while she looked conscious and uneasy.

Then changing his tone, he remarked on the scene. Pointing out a group of firs in the far distance, which grew on the Grange estate, and speaking in a way which at once engaged attention and sympathy, he told of the dreams he had under an Indian sun; how he had looked to this day as the goal—the object of his life; his childish remembrance of the place so vivid—his desire so unalterable, so strong. He had not looked for such a welcome, but it was appreciated—it was felt; and surely if ever human voice expressed feeling, his did. I cannot remember all he said; he touched on many subjects, and always spoke well: nor was he a mere talker; he could also listen, and he seemed to possess a key which unlocked the minds of others. We each and all talked. A magic word here and there, now and then, and everyone was, as it were, brought out. My father was charmed. Lady Templar, who had joined us, was more gracious than I had ever seen her. Florence was animated and lively, and was vehement in her praises of the day, and very unwilling to return, when the wise ones pointed

out that it was time to do so. We all returned together — that is, the Templars, Charles, Mr. Graham, and ourselves; Charles, beside my chair, finding fault with the evening, saying, "It was all folly; he knew how it would be," &c. Mr. Graham was talking to Lady Templar, and looking from time to time at Florence. We parted at the Barton gate. My father, in a hearty, cordial manner, pressed both gentlemen to come in and partake of our supper, which they did.

I felt proud of my parents that evening. Mr. Graham showed so plainly how he admired my mother's sweet face, and that he appreciated my father, consulting him and talking so seriously and earnestly about his future prospects, as a younger man should do to an elder; every now and then pausing and making some complimentary remark—though, by the way, it was far more than mere compliment, more refined and subtle—about the house, the English comfort of the room, the excellence of the pastry or preserve: all of which kindled my dear mother's face till it was radiant with pleasure; and strong and loud were the praises bestowed on him after he left.

"I am sure he is an excellent man!" said my mother.

"A remarkable one, doubtless," said my father.

"Bless me! how he does stare, though!" remarked my little brother.

"What an odd figure he has!" said Charles, who had been unusually silent all the evening. "I should think the little Nabob must be pleased and gratified."

"Pooh, pooh, Charles!" said my father: "every man is not so well built as yourself; but Graham is no fool, take my word. A little Nabob, indeed! The epithet is unsuitable and absurd!"

"He has managed to flatter you all preciously," Charles answered pettishly.

"Flatter!" exclaimed I rather indignantly; but it was true—I learnt afterwards how true. He flattered so well, that few were aware of it.

I lay awake half that night. It had been an eventful, marked day to me: I was not accustomed to see such gaiety. The dancers seemed still to flit before me; the tunes rang in my ears; and still that marvellously toned voice and the strange eyes haunted me. Did I like him or not? I fell asleep before I could decide.

A nightmare dream possessed me.

I saw Charles pushing Florence into the river. I screamed for help; I vainly tried to prevent him. I heard the splash; I saw her float down the stream.

I could not reach her; and he was dragging me away by the arm to prevent my saving her! I awoke. Some one was indeed pulling me. My mother smiled and said, "How you have been screaming, Jenny! and all about Charles!"

"I have been feverish: it was the excitement, I suppose," said I feebly.

My mother kindly remarked that it was yet early, and I had better try and sleep. So gently drawing the curtains she left me.

But the dream disturbed me; and after tossing about restlessly, I was glad to rise and open the window; the fresh morning air revived me, and I could not help smiling at myself, as I saw Cousin Charles returning from one of his early walks. He liked to go two or three miles before breakfast, and now he looked so fresh, so glad, after his exercise—so unlike that face in the dream!

I told him my hideous night vision, when he came that morning.

"That is strange!" he said. "Why, Jenny, I dreamt that I was drowning, and she, Miss Templar, would not put out a stick to save me! I fear mine is the nearest the truth!"

While we were talking, Mr. Graham was ushered in. He came to inquire merely, but he lingered

on and on; recommending me books; talking of foreign countries, vast jungles, and fantastic grotesque buildings; and eloquently bringing every scene before me.

Then apologizing for his visitation, warning my mother not to be "too kind," or she would find him a troublesome visitor, he *looked* his farewell, and left us.

CHAPTER VII.

TOWN-HALL ASSEMBLIES.

AND now things resumed their usual course at Templar's Cross. Mr. Graham had been asked everywhere; everywhere he had left a favourable impression. He was now residing in one of the wings of the Grange, and most of his time was spent in superintending the alterations he was making in the house and grounds. "The Grange" was only four miles from our town, however, and seldom did a day pass without his being there; sometimes to lunch with the Rector, and talk and sing with the pretty Miss Kings, and sometimes to sup with us, and often not leaving us till past midnight. Our suppers were rather celebrated, and my dear mother loved to see "a friend or two drop in" without "fuss," to partake of her dainty little dishes. My father, too, was generally at home at that hour. I don't know how it was, but conversa-

tion then seemed to flow with peculiar ease and brightness. Form and ceremony did not suit the soil, and always perished.

Florence often compared the sociality and warmth of this little re-union with the sombre, stately grandeur of her home. She was always now glad of an invitation, and her mother's permission, to join us, though my Cousin Charles was invariably there.

Perhaps she thought that he had given her up as hopeless, for, certainly, he seldom now annoyed her by any undue attention; though I wondered if she was at all aware of the unceasing care for her, and anxiety for her pleasure, which pervaded every action of his. Her manner became less haughty towards him, though it was perfectly indifferent. She joined the rest in a laugh at his funny sea stories and jokes—but in these he did not often now indulge. He was grave and silent; generally poring over a book, or a newspaper, or teaching my brothers sundry nautical knots. When Mr. Graham was of our party I observed that Charles grew more animated and talkative, and he would then return a little to his old earnest and more marked attention to Florence. One evening I remember particularly, when he was anticipating

every want of hers, fetching stool and screen, and almost bending over her chair with a glowing impassioned face, I suddenly looked towards Mr. Graham, who had been talking to my mother: his whole intensity of gaze was fixed on Florence. There was a mixture of admiration, interest, and sarcasm in the expression—the latter predominating—when Charles was sent off with one of her most freezing and repelling bows. On looking up she met Mr. Graham's eyes and blushed scarlet, while she hastily moved for her work. From this time I always observed that she grew shy, and lost her habitual presence of mind when he looked at or addressed her. But this was not peculiar to Florence. Everyone's eye drooped before his at first: it was always an effort to look him well in the face.

Of course a rich and gifted single man could not escape being talked of as one likely to marry, and Mr. Graham was apparently too fond of ladies' society to heed any harmless gossip that might ensue. But for some time the wise heads seemed rather puzzled as to where this popular man had fixed his heart. No one seemed for an instant to doubt his choosing among our own belles, for we had always been rather famous for beauty in the

town and neighbourhood, and he had already shown so much favour and love for the land of his fathers; yet, though both the Miss Kings seemed especially marked out as favourites, his conversation and attentions were far too generally bestowed for any one person to lay claim to a peculiar share.

The house that he least visited in the whole town was the Barton.

He was often at our house, being at this time most kindly and warmly interested in planning some kind of support which he fancied would be a great help to me. My father was gratified by his kindness, and surprised at the knowledge and science he displayed in their consultations.

I may just add here, that this contrivance succeeded perfectly; and henceforth I moved about with comparative ease, and was consequently more able to mix in society, of which I was naturally very fond.

The large room in our town-hall, which served for all public meetings, was also used as a ball-room, and very pleasant assemblies took place once a month, to which all the county folks were glad to come. There was a very good town band for the dancers, and the inner room was provided with card-tables for the elders. I always had a chair

placed in a quiet corner, from whence I made my observations, and heartily enjoyed the gay scene. Being only a looker on, I did see many things which the actors themselves were hardly conscious of.

There was one particular figure which always attracted my attention—many a little tale of love and coquetry have I woven in watching it. I think it is called “Right and Left.” Each lady as she goes down the middle is turned by every gentleman, while her partner turns the ladies. Now it was amusing to me to observe how this was done. Sometimes there was a hearty shake of the hand from the gentleman; sometimes only the extreme tips of the fingers were vouchsafed. In some cases a few words were exchanged. It was an opportunity for judging very fairly on what terms each lady and gentleman stood to each other. Two observations I particularly made:—first, that when Florence had to go to Mr. Graham it was in a timid, blushing manner, thoroughly different from the graceful yet stately way in which her hand was offered to any other gentleman; secondly, that Mr. Gordon Graham seemed never to lose sight of her; but kept a steady penetrating gaze on her through all the maze of the figure. I should have said that he looked at nothing and no one else, but I supposed

I was mistaken, when I heard Miss King say, "What lynx eyes that man has! really, wherever one is, one is sure to find him gazing at one."

"Indeed!" remarked another young lady, "do *you* find this also? I was just saying, that I never saw anything so odd and so disagreeable; one is for ever catching his eye! And such an eye! I declare it is not 'canny!'"

He certainly had a curious power; and one night, after noticing it particularly, I could not help remembering an account of the charm snakes are said to exercise in this way.

Mr. Graham did not dance much. His "way" was to find a tempting seat for a lady after a dance was finished, and then commence so fascinating a conversation that she found herself too tired to dance again, and consequently sat so long by him as to draw the attention of the whole room on her.

At first, it was Miss King, or a very dashing, fashionable Miss Parker, who came to the balls; but soon it was Miss Templar—soon he did not scruple to ask her to sit out with him one dance after another; and then my whole attention was absorbed in them, for she generally contrived to be near me, and I learnt to feel the power of that man: I ceased to have even a passing wish to dance with the

others—so riveting was his fascination—so strangely thrilling his voice—so deeply was I interested in him, for her: so intensely did I admire her in this her new found beauty, in which the softness and sensibility, and a little of the timidity of Fanny, seemed blended with her own stronger character. Her magnificent, flashing eyes were now often bent on the ground, the rich colour mantling up in her face; and all that cold, stony, and scornful expression she could too often assume melted away beneath—what?—I often asked *what?*—for I had not discovered anything in his face akin to Charles's look of inexpressible love, and this had always seemed to petrify her.

CHAPTER VIII.

ARRANGING BOUQUETS.

OF all the persons most affected by Mr. Graham's return, I think his old aunt felt the most. She fluttered like a bird disturbed from its cage-home of many years. The excitement was pleasing, but the honour weighed on her spirit. Poor old lady, she not only had another and far handsomer shawl to cherish, and guard, and to do everything with but wear it, but she had the onerous charge of some dozen of heavy, rich Bandanas—intended, of course, for her husband's use; but this was beyond her comprehension. Every day she took them out and weighed them in her trembling hand, repeating the self-same wonders about the riches of that country which produced them, and exclaiming under her breath at the surprising fact, that such fine and delicate embroidery on the cobweb-like muslin which her munificent nephew also pressed upon

her, was actually done by black men—black men, who wore turbans and lived upon rice!

Her husband smiled on in his silent, shrewd fashion, and, perhaps, his snuff-box was a little oftener replenished than usual, as he snuffed up the fragrant dust, while chuckling over a joke on the “Nabob” and the admiring townsfolk.

“Gordon has plenty of sense, no doubt,” he remarked one morning, when my mother was there and had been admiring Mr. Graham’s treasures. “By the way, is my friend Dr. Wilson aggrieved?”

“At what, sir?”

“At the disappointment it naturally must be to a medical man, to find in the expected sickly Nabob, with a diseased liver, a fairly clear-skinned and healthy man—at being cheated thereby out of a life patient, whose rupees would replace his mercury and calomel stores.”

“Indeed!” bridled up my mother; “it is quite a new thing for Dr. Wilson to be accused of mercenary views. You don’t really suppose that my husband cares to see one of your nephew’s paltry coins in his hand!”

“No, surely no,” put in Mrs. Graham, flushing up with nervous fear at the ruffled tone of voice in which my mother spoke. “Mr. Graham never meant

such a thing—did you, my dear? Why, it would be very like murder, to wish a person to be ill, and with anything so horrible as a diseased liver. He is only joking, Mrs. Wilson; my husband likes jokes, only he is so grave, people don't find them out. Ah, what a comfort it is, my dear ma'am, to find that he is not only rich—my nephew, I mean—but so good, so moral."

"Nonsense, Mrs. Graham," put in her husband; "what do you know of his morals or his goodness? He is no better than other men, depend upon it; only I fancy Master Gordon is a plausible fellow, and thoroughly knows the measure of his acquaintance."

"You have said that before, Mr. Graham; but I believe he is good. He is very kind and liberal to the poor, I am told; and his black footman told our Betty that he never ill-used his slaves, and was a good master. And then, only think of his buying an old woman like me such grand presents; and even his nurse—a woman who now keeps a tobacco-shop in London—he remembered her, and brought her heaps of things, besides a bag full of money. And then," continued the poor old lady, trembling more and more as the subject excited her—"and then, Mrs. Wilson, what beautiful treasures he has

collected, I am told; and, indeed, he showed me some jewels, and all, of course, to be for his wife—God send him a good one!”

This kind old lady did not live to see her niece. She lost strength and flesh daily, and at last drooped away like a withered plant. The stir and excitement had hastened her end; the bustle and her new cares were all too much for her. Her nephew dutifully followed her to her rest in the Graham vault; and her somewhat cynical old husband refused to go to the Grange, or to see any condoling visitors. But everything about him told that he missed the familiar, gentle presence of his wife—the faithful companion of a rather troublous life.

Again were Mr. Graham's praises sounded for his exemplary conduct as a nephew—his untiring attention and care of the bereaved and solitary old man.

And together with these praises were whispers of certain bales of rich Cashmeres—of rare pearls and valuable gems of all kinds, lying in costly inlaid cabinets and sweet sandal-wood caskets. Bright eyes grew brighter as all these treasures were spoken of—treasures only suitable for a woman; many of them being gold and silver muslins, fans, ornaments, and all kinds of gorgeous Eastern treasures. Of course they were destined for the chosen fair one

who was in due time to preside over the comfortable, re-built mansion, and be privileged to wander through the groves and shrubberies his taste, skill, and money were creating round the Grange.

Was it any wonder that lesser stars should pale, and be almost lost to sight? What was even the handsome and gallant Captain Sutton—with his paltry two hundred, and his pay, and his hum-drum, dark-roomed house in the town—beside the princely possessor of such treasures—a man, too, with so many charms, though his build might not be exactly that of an Apollo? At least, this was the plain English of all the talk I often heard; this was the honest result of the complicated calculations of the arithmetical problem so many were striving to solve.

“Wonders will never cease!” exclaimed my mother one evening, as she came in from a neighbouring visit to an invalid who lived near us. “Now guess, Jenny, who I have seen Mr. Graham with. Ah, I see you are dying to know. But only think, Mr. Wilson,”—(going up to my father)—“Lord Bolton!—yes, Jenny, the Earl himself! They were in close talk; and then a lady—I could not see her face—looked out of the coach window and said something to the Earl, and he and Mr.

Graham both got into the carriage and they drove off. A carriage and four thorough-bred horses, and there were outriders besides! So, as I said, wonders never will cease. The Earl was never known to visit anyone hereabouts before, except on very particular occasions."

"This is a particular occasion," my father said. "Probably he means to bring in Graham for the borough. I know he, Graham, has a wish to get into Parliament, and I think him a very fit man."

"Dear me! Well!—M.P.! Who would have thought it? His poor old aunt would have been proud! and, no doubt, so will his uncle, though of course he won't own it. But, Mr. Wilson, who was that lady, do you think? The Countess is dead, I know."

"Lady Bertha, no doubt, his daughter—his only child."

"Is she pretty?" I eagerly asked.

My father laughed. "No, Jenny; as little like what you imagine a Lady Bertha Bolton—an earl's daughter—as possible. I have seen her, when attending at the castle professionally: she appeared a good and kind-hearted person, but is short and thick, with a sallow complexion, and a face rather marked with small-pox."

"Is she very clever and learned, or fascinating?" I again asked.

Again my father smiled, and said, "Neither one nor the other; but she will be very rich."

"Oh!" I said aloud, though speaking more to myself than to any one else. "Then riches cannot be a great attraction, he is so rich himself."

A dry "Hem!" from my father, and then he said, "The *he* of your thoughts is ambitious, I guess; and as all the ladies seem to say he is vastly agreeable, I should not at all wonder what may happen."

"I should wonder very much," I replied; "in fact, I am sure Mr. Graham will never marry an ugly woman—he is such an admirer of beauty!"

Nevertheless, my father proved a true prophet in some degree.

Mr. Gordon Graham was very often at Bolton Castle. In due time he was returned a member for our town; and the rumour was, that he might be an earl's son-in-law if he pleased.

However this might be, Mr. Graham knew the art of not neglecting little people for great; rather, I should say, he possessed an innate tact—a gift beyond that of anyone that I ever met with—to

know exactly what to say, and how to say it, to everyone.

When the Grange was completed, Mr. Graham announced his intention of giving a large ball, in order to make some return for the welcome he had received.

He had returned with honour after his first parliamentary season: he was pronounced to be more agreeable than ever. We were proud of our member. My mother was consulted about the supper. "No one knew such pretty dishes, or so well understood the art of laying them out with taste, not overloading a table, as Mrs. Wilson." And Mrs. Wilson was never happier than when she was calling up all her experience and skill to adorn the Grange table, being determined to surprise him with a few of her special favourites which he had not seen; and with such lovely China and plate, how very nice it would look!

Lady Templar was led into an animated discussion about lighting the saloon; while several young ladies' opinion was asked about the festoons, and arrangements of flowers. "No festal occasion was complete without flowers," Mr. Graham said; "and no hands but ladies' could do justice to such ornaments!" How privileged was I, when with

my mother I drove in Mr. Graham's carriage to the Grange in the early morning. We were to be there all day to lend our help.

He showed us his arrangements, which seemed to me to be admirable. The magnificence and beauty of the rooms lately completed bewildered me; the judicious use of gold and colour, and, what was rare in those days, looking-glasses let in so as to reflect everything two-fold, and add to the light; above all, the conservatory, with its dazzling blossoms and its fairy, glittering fountain!

The gardener was tying up bouquets. "Ah! that will do for Miss King," remarked Mr. Graham; "it is bright and brilliant. And this will do for Miss Parker; and here is a lordly one—a perfectly magnificent one for Lady Bertha Bolton; and now, Miss Wilson—Jenny!—may I call you so? we must select a rare—a peerless bouquet, distinct from all the rest, for—"

He looked at me in his searching way—half sarcastically, I thought; my eyes fell beneath his, but still I dared to finish his sentence for him. "For Florence Templar?"

"Yes! for Florence Templar," he repeated, lingering on the words. "A beautiful name, worthy of the best. What shall it be?"

I went towards some rare heaths—they were very rare then in England.

“Yes,” he said, “that will do.”

“Oh, this is fit for a queen!” I exclaimed, as he arranged the flowers.”

“For the Queen of Beauty,” he added, in a low voice.

This time I tried to look into his face, for I could make out nothing from his voice to-day. It was constrained, dry, and wiry.

“Now, little Jenny—I don’t know why, but it is pleasant as well as natural so to call you—take this for your good mother; and here is a fragrant one for yourself: beautiful cold heaths don’t suit you; they don’t blend with tender thoughts, or enchant one’s senses as the perfume of this violet or myrtle does.”

“You have seen heaths grow out of doors?” I said, rather wishing to stop him.

“Yes—such as these by the road-side; but look at this! I can’t possibly present this to—to my Lady Bertha; can I?” He pointed to a sprig of orange blossom, which the gardener had put in.

“It is the crowning bit of the whole, Mr. Graham! You must not take it away,” I exclaimed, and putting my hand on his to stop him.

But he laughed, and said—"It might be understood to convey a meaning that he was not prepared to give to any lady *at present*."

Mr. Graham was here called away to give directions to the master of the band, and I remained dreaming in the beautiful conservatory, and trying to fathom that strange man's meaning. Every time I was with him he mystified me. Charles used to abuse him for this, and sometimes called him "a Jesuit;" but it had, I own, a charm for me, and if all Jesuits were like him in this respect, they must be very dangerous people, I thought. But then I fell into a train of thought, comparing his manner with that of my cousin Charles—who was clear as the purest, most limpid water, affording no room for doubt, or even speculation. One felt sure that what his eyes spoke, his lips echoed—and that both were prompted straight from the heart. His voice was strong, manly, and clear, giving no uncertain sound. He did not understand the art of veiling truth; and if reserve was right or was forced upon him, it was unpleasant and unnatural.

But with Gordon Graham, who could pretend to interpret half his smiles?—far less those tones of voice in which some tale distinct from that conveyed by the words seemed to run on like the murmur of

a hidden brook, such various emotions were roused by and expressed in a single note. It was more like some exquisite musical instrument, or as I often fancied, the fairy harp belonging to the ogre in "Jack and the Bean Stalk" might have uttered tones like his—human in its meaning, and yet more than human in its sweetness and power. I lose myself in attempts to describe him and his voice. A voice sometimes expresses so much to me! And I think his, more or less, had power over everyone.

CHAPTER IX.

THE M.P.'S BALL.

At last all was complete! The rooms were lighted, the band tuning their instruments, footmen with eager stiffness standing about in every direction; while Mr. Graham, his uncle—who, to the surprise of everyone, consented to come—my mother, and myself, were grouped together in what was to be the reception-room.

“Of course, Gordon, the case admits of no doubt—not a shadow of doubt!” said his uncle. “You open the ball with Lady Bertha.” And the old man looked at his nephew almost as keenly as Gordon could look.

A slight—very slight shrug of the shoulders, and a dubious glance round the room, was his answer. Then, with his eyes fixed on my face, he said—“And Sir Alexander Onslow will take Miss Templar; au reste, let it be ad libitum—people can please themselves.”

My mother and Mr. Graham continued to talk over arrangements, while I, seated half in a corner on a delicious chair, watched the host as he trod up and down the long brilliant room, wondering why he was not taller and handsomer, and wondering if Florence would like her partner and all kinds of things.

I forgot to say that this Sir Alexander had for some little time been very pointed in his attentions to Florence, and was encouraged by the mother; yet Lady Templar's favourite was evidently still my cousin Charles. Her admiration—her strong love of beauty—was, I suppose, the cause: I believe it was an effort to Lady Templar to be properly civil to any one who was not beautiful. It often pained me to see her manner to Charles, knowing how every breath fanned the flame, and feeling how hopeless it was.

But now the room began to fill. Bright colours, sheeny satins, soft velvets, and airy gauze, fluttered in the light, and formed groups which harmonized amongst the stands of flowers. The silence changed into a confused murmur, which, with the sounds of the violins still seeking the right tone in the distance, excited me so that I could hardly sit still.

There was a wider and more pompous opening

the folding doors than usual, and the servant's voice sounded louder, when "Lord Bolton and Lady Bertha" were announced.

She was small and unshapely—wretchedly dressed in Quaker-coloured silk. Her dress, and her complexion, and her hair, were all the same hue. But she seemed amiable, and was certainly shy; and quite looked down as Mr. Graham addressed her.

This party was followed by Sir Alexander—a mighty man of inches, carrying his head far above other mortals. He had a florid, good-natured face, and talked very loudly, and in a hearty though pompous tone.

"Beauty and rank are sometimes divided," Mr. Graham half whispered to me, in his musical voice. "That exceedingly well grown Baronet—what do you think of him? Is he fit to win lady's love, or to quaff good ale and whip in his hounds? Now, look!" he added. "Here comes something sparkling. That is a well arranged party. The venerable Rector, with his regular and handsome face, sets off his lovely nieces. Ha! I thought so. They are the heralds—the tinted clouds which announce sunrise!"

Lady Templar, leaning on my cousin Charles's arm, entered, followed by Florence, as he spoke.

Mr. Graham hastened to receive them. I wondered how he managed to do the honours to the Rector and his nieces, and to Lady Templar, all at once, yet without the slightest fuss. Charles, released from the mother, looked round—but Mr. Graham was there, and Florence's eyes drooped as I had never seen them, while her cheeks were lit up with bright, soft blushes, which came and went with every breath.

I know not exactly what her dress was; I only know its effect. Oh, nothing was like it in the room! That pearly satin, that long, soft feather which curled and drooped on her stately neck; no, it was no wonder that Sir Alexander and all the gentlemen turned and gazed, and approached nearer and nearer to the Magnet.

She took a seat by me, Charles behind her. He was in the act of asking her to dance, when Mr. Graham came up.

"Sutton, will you take Miss Parker? and Sir Alexander desires the honour of Miss Templar's hand."

Searching, penetrating was the look Mr. Graham gave; and I am quite sure that neither the change from softness and pleasure to cold indifference which passed over Florence's face, nor Charles's hasty

gesture and clouded brow, nor the Baronet's full-blown gaze of admiration, escaped him.

When I reached the ball-room, led by our kind Rector, I saw the bouquets had been presented. Bessie King had placed hers in her sash; Lady Bertha was admiring and enjoying hers; Florence's was held carelessly, her hand resting on a marble slab, while her partner talked eagerly.

Well! the dance proceeded, much as all others do. The music was strangely exciting, making me long to give way to tears—perhaps this was because I could not dance, or because I was weak and silly; I was glad no one spoke to me.

Mr. Graham, though not celebrated for good dancing, moved, I thought, like a gentleman and with much spirit—indeed, I confess I liked his dancing better than many who *footed* it more skilfully. But when Charles began, I felt the difference. His very walking through the figure, which he did from laziness or displeasure, had a grace. His most beautiful head thrown back with such an air of conscious power! I was not surprised to hear old Mr. Graham, who was fond of classical allusions, liken him to Apollo.

I saw him approach Florence to turn her in the

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figure, and he bent down with such earnest devotion in his eyes, evidently saying something, that I did wonder how she could answer him as she must have done, for when he rejoined his partner there was an inexpressible sadness in his face.

During the next dance he stood out.

"Charles, why don't you dance?" I asked.

"I am tired."

"What, so soon?"

At that moment I saw Mr. Graham lead Florence out; she was now looking at her flowers. As they passed I heard the soft flow of Italian; he was fond of quoting it, and Florence blushed deeply.

An impatient movement, and a deep sigh, from Charles.

"Don't, Charles—pray don't look so unhappy," I said. "Everyone will notice it."

"Thank you, Jenny, it is kindly meant. But I care not! I believe I am a desperate fool—I know I am! It is a timely discovery. Why, I could not find her in shoes!—but—but—God knows how I love her! If I am a poor fellow, every way unworthy of her, I can offer her a pure and honest heart devoted to her. She does not well to trample on me!"

I felt my chair shake as his hand rested on

its back; his face was almost convulsed with emotion.

"By Heaven!" he exclaimed, after a pause, "I can't stand it—I will speak! Will she give herself to a profligate?—a mere man of the world—an unprincipled, deformed—"

"Hush, hush, Charles!" I whispered, quite alarmed at his vehemence. How glad I was to see my father come near us.

"Charles, lad, what ails? *You* not dancing, and Bessie King sitting out. For shame, man!" Then remarking Charles' agitated countenance, he added—"Poor fellow, I wish you were at sea again. This will never do."

"I am a fool, sir—a desperate fool," exclaimed Charles, bitterly, "but I don't wish to be the laughing-stock of the room." And he moved away and was soon lost in the crowd.

Towards the middle of the evening he was again by me.

"People are talking of her being Lady Onslow!" he laughed, scornfully; "I know better. That mountain of a man will be frozen out. My Lady Templar says she likes him; but—I know—I know that snake—that humbug—the large, long-headed, little Nabob who bewitches you all, Jenny—yes,

even you—he will succeed; and knowing what I know, shall I allow it?—shall I keep silence, and let the poor moth kill herself?”

“Charles, what do you mean? what do you know?”

“I can’t tell you now, Jenny; but come, they are going to supper. I must have you, or I shall explode. I am dangerous to-night. At sea! I wish to Heaven I was there.” And he actually began to whistle, till I smiled and stopped him.

“Jenny! when I am gone, mind, you are to watch for her. I shall tell you—you must save her.”

“Captain Sutton, may I trouble you to take this shawl to my daughter? I dread her catching cold,” said Lady Templar, in her blindest voice, adding, “I will take care of your cousin meanwhile.”

He was gone in a moment, and we were seated before they came back.

They entered together—Florence, Charles, and Sir Alexander. The crimson Cashmere became her well; and so thought Mr. Graham, as from the top of the long table his eyes took in all and everything.

“She actually loathes me,” whispered Charles, as

he seated himself by me, and Sir Alexander led Florence higher up.

How could I help wondering that this was possible—that any woman could; but I said nothing.

“Well, I hope she will enjoy the intellectual Baronet’s conversation,” he presently said.

“Oh, Charles, you are growing bitter.”

“Bitter as gall. Yes, Jenny, I am—I am in a fearful—in fact I don’t understand myself. But I shall soon be at sea. Shall I help you to some of this elaborate affair?”

Presently he said, speaking very low in my ear, “Jenny, will you oblige me—do me a great favour, my dear little coz?”

“Oh, Charles, you know I will do anything to please you!”

“Would you?” looking at me with earnest, searching eyes. “Would you really, Jenny? But I can’t tell you now.”

He said no more; and I, looking once in his face, felt inclined to respect his silence. Directly after supper, he left with us, taking a seat in our carriage. I believe we were the first to go. I regretted it; but my mother had a bad headache from fatigue, and was eager to be at home. My father took a nap during our drive, and my mother was glad to lean

back in silence. Not a word was uttered. An occasional sigh—stifled, yet deep—met my ear. I would have given anything at that moment to be gifted with the power of consolation; but my wishes and thoughts were to be pressed back—smothered unmercifully. I could at least be silent, and let him be so—but all this is nothing to the purpose. That hour of silence—laden with heaviness, agitated with heart-struggles—let it pass!

CHAPTER X.

FAREWELL.

“ AFTER a storm comes a calm.”

And is it not often so before? or, rather, are there not strange lights—brilliant effects—a thrilling “hush”—causing the pulses to beat one knows not why?

At the Barton there seemed warmth and light. Lady Templar had laid aside her stern and hard manner; her eyes were often almost fondly bent on Florence. She was proud of the admiration bestowed on her child, and she spared no trouble and no expense for her.

It was openly declared that Lady Templar's own large fortune would be entirely her daughter's. Nothing was to go to the son but the entailed property. There was no lack of suitors, and the Barton was now opened to visitors as it had never been before. It was the gayest house in the neigh-

bourhood, instead of being the old, solemn, deserted building on which I had gazed from a child. Scarcely a day passed but Sir Alexander Onslow's riding horse and groom or curricule stood at the gates.

Our old nurse, a privileged person, was one day standing by me looking towards the Barton, when Sir Alexander rode up to the gate.

“And so Miss Templar is going to Thorny Park, Miss Jenny! Ay, indeed 'tis true! the house-keeper at the Barton told me as how Lady Templar and Miss Templar were going to a lunch, and to see the prospect; and people do tell that she will be missis there afore long. I'm sorry your cousin was so put back, with his handsome face. Sure an there war money enough for both—and then he'd never have to go to sea again. Every one likes un, and is sorry. Bless un! he's a pretty spoken gentleman; but God be praised, Miss Jenny, 'that she's not a-going to be deceived by that cruel, clever gentleman, Mr. Graham! The Lord save her from the like o' that!”

“I don't know why you should say so,” I remarked.

“Not know? Why, Miss Jenny, they say he's a bad man, spite of his ways, which be so insinuating. Bless us—(lowering her voice to a whisper)—why,

they say all his gold pieces were gained by the flesh and blood of the poor blacks. Ay, ay—I've heard tell how they do in the Injies; and indeed I don't care for his coming here so often as he does."

"How can you believe such ignorant, wicked slander, Nurse?"

"'Tis true, you may depend, Miss Jenny; and as to his character—there's tales enough a-flying about the town."

Here she was hurried away to answer a bell, and I dismissed the subject from my mind; I had not time to think of the Nabob then.

That evening Charles came to supper. He was flushed, and evidently excited. He was going to start the next day for London, having heard that there was a chance of his getting employment.

My mother produced her silver saucepan and mulled some wine, as a kind of stirrup-cup at parting; and to have heard the laughs and the light, joyous words, and the jokes, one would not have thought there was any such thing as sorrow—but there it was, brooding over us like a shadow; and at every pause, when we heard the tick of the old clock, it had the effect of again setting us off to take refuge in senseless chatter and laughter, bent on cheating ourselves!

Charles was coaxed by my brothers to sing. It was a comic song ; but I was obliged to get up and watch the clouds. I have never liked comic songs since.

When the supper things were removed, he joined me at the window. I was ever very silly : and I believe I was crying. You know, my dears, he was my cousin ; and I never liked partings and—Well, where was I ? Yes ; we stood at the window, and the old clock went on ticking—the same clock you hear now—and we saw the lights in the Barton windows ; and I think we felt alike just at that moment, and perhaps made resolves in our hearts. At all events, I understood the tone in which he said—

“ Jenny, I have given it up ! God help me ! But remember, Jenny ! if ever there should come a time—if she should suffer—should her present prosperity be clouded, and sorrow or neglect fall on her—remember, that while I live, there is one who will—ay, who would sacrifice all to do her good ! But this is nonsense. I may as well fancy that shining star yonder would need my help.”

“ But, Charles, what is it you meant about Mr. Graham ? You said you would tell me.”

“ I have changed my mind ! At all events, not

to you, Jenny—it suits not your ears; and perhaps I am not the person to speak.”

Then he put his hand on my shoulder and bent low to reach my ear—for my brother had come again to the room—whispering—

“Farewell, Jenny; tell—tell her I blessed her, and that I am sorry I ever annoyed her. God bless you!”

He wrung my hand, turned to go—returned to give me a kiss, and then left the room calling my brothers to come with him.

I was startled by a ring at the door. I don’t know how long I had sat there, but the candle was in a deplorable state, and no one had come in. Now a note was placed in my hands. It was from Florence. It ran thus—

“Come to me early to-morrow, dear Jenny, I want to see you very much. I am perplexed and unhappy. I have great news to tell you; and I never wanted advice so much in my life. Lady Templar is astonishingly kind; but—but—in fact come, Jenny, and advise your friend,

“F. T.”

I drew out the writing materials to answer this,

of course promising to obey the summons. I had not sealed my note, before there was another knock at the door;—surely it was an unquiet evening that! Then there was my father's voice inquiring for my mother; and then the door opened, and my father came in, followed by Mr. Graham. It seemed they had ridden together, and Mr. Graham's horse was rather lame. My father sent me to order the spare bed to be prepared, and to tell my mother Mr. Graham would pass the night at our house. Poor soul! I found her in a flood of tears. She was very fond of my cousin; but she roused herself to be hospitable, and not to show a "dismal face" to her husband—a ruling principle of her life!

I was surprised, on re-entering the parlour, to hear Mr. Graham talking of Sir Edward Templar and his wife. He had met them often in London; and said that Lady Templar was quite the fashion, and one of the most lovely women he ever saw. He spoke strongly of the harsh and unjust treatment that Sir Edward had received from his mother, and hinted at trying to bring about a reconciliation.

"That would thin Miss Templar's crowd of admirers, I should think?" my father remarked, in his dry way.

Somehow, I listened eagerly for an answer, but did not look up. It came. .

“I should think Miss Templar’s claims to be admired were independent of a few thousands?”

He spoke in the thrilling tone he sometimes, though rarely used, giving common-place words a new meaning. I felt relieved and pleased, though I smiled at myself as I thought, what matter is it to me what Mr. Graham is, whether worldly or not? But I was tired—his conversation did not seem as fascinating as usual. I was glad to make some excuse and leave the room, not to return.

“What could the news be?” I wondered. The clouds had risen, and the star—that star Florence had been likened to—was obscured. What a wretched thing it must be to travel in rainy weather, I thought; and at last I fell asleep while listening to the pattering drops against the window.

CHAPTER XI.

SHAKSPEARE AND MILTON LEND A HELPING HAND.

It was still raining when I awoke from a feverish sleep and agitating dream. You may suppose that I remembered my engagement; but strange pains shot through me, and I was shivering and ill. I tried to rise, but it would not do.

To be brief—I did not leave my bed for a fortnight. I had a nervous fever; and so strict were my father's orders that I should be kept quiet, that no one but my mother and nurse had been allowed to see me. I had been delirious throughout, and had given much alarm to my friends.

The first thing I was conscious of, was the seeing a beautiful vase of flowers standing on my table, and my mother reading a letter and drying her tears. Hearing me move, she rose and came to me, murmuring her thanksgivings at my recovery.

I begged to be told the news. She shook her

head, with a smile and a tear ; but seeing, I suppose, that I should be only more excited by not hearing, she bade me lie quite still, and after taking some nourishment, she would tell me everything.

“ Well then, my dear, you must know that your father has been made very happy—has been quite flattered, by a handsome present from the townsfolk—a silver tea and coffee-pot, and cream-ewer, with an inscription ; and there was a public meeting, and speeches, and great honour done him. I never was so proud in my life. And so is he, too ; only he doesn't like to own it too much, you know. Well, then, let me see—oh, William has consented to be articled to Mr. Moor, the solicitor—and—and—”

“ Florence!—the Templars !” I murmured.

“ Ah, to be sure. Florence has refused Sir Alexander ! Lady Templar was very angry indeed, they say ; but it passed off. Florence has a way of managing her mother. And there are half-a-dozen others, I am told, all excellent matches—all dying to have her. And, by the by, she has been very attentive and kind, coming every day to inquire for you ; and my lady herself offered grapes or jelly, and, in fact, was very kind indeed. But Miss Templar has quite won my heart. I begin to like

her as well as I did her poor dear sister. She is quite affectionate to me. I assure you that several evenings she has proposed staying to supper, just to cheer up 'dear Dr. Wilson,' as she calls him; and then Mr. Graham—who has also been very polite in inquiring—would come in also, and so I left your father with an easy mind, and could sit with you."

"Is that all, mother?" I said, as she paused.

"Yes; I cannot think of any more news."

"Are there no letters?"

"Yes—why yes, certainly, there have been two or three from Charles; and to-day we have been made glad by hearing that he is appointed to the *Queen*. He says he shall probably be able to see us again for a few days, but is not sure. I almost hope he will not come. Partings are so dismal, and I know it will so upset your father; although, of course, it is a fine thing for him to be employed."

There was no lack of time and opportunity for me to ponder over this budget of news. I was still far from recovery, and quiet was insisted on.

At last I was carried into my own sitting-room, which was on the same floor, and fitted up very comfortably. It made me feel faint, I remember, to watch my old rook friends as I lay back in

my cushioned chair. They seemed overpoweringly busy and garrulous. To touch a flower, to look languidly round the room, and if a thought asked admittance to sigh it away, was all I did for days and days.

Then, when a little stronger, I began to look with impatience for Florence; and when she came, the room seemed filled with beauty. Her springy and healthful gait was a marvel to me. Silently I sat watching her every movement: if she leaned on the table, or if she moved about, or if she sat on a low seat and looked up at me, it was each and all beautiful. Whatever she did, as the Prince so prettily said to Perdita, "that became her best."

But I felt that a change had taken place. A certain touch of imperiousness had gone, and in its stead there was a womanly desire to please—a softness and gentleness. Her lips seemed fuller and more curling; her hair even appeared to me to fall in more graceful waves. It was as if some exquisite waxen flower, touched by a magic wand, was suddenly endued with life, and became sensitive and capable of being nursed into fragrance, or withered by a rude touch.

Yes, I wondered at her: I wondered there should

be two such opposites on God's earth as Florence and myself.

A few days after my first seeing her, she told me with real glee that Lady Templar was gone to see a distant estate belonging to the family, and would probably be absent a fortnight. In the mean time she had *carte blanche* to be as much with us as "Dr. and Mrs. Wilson would allow."

"I cannot think what you find so attractive here, Florence," I said, "to leave your beautiful rooms and grounds for these!"

"As if fine rooms and extensive grounds made one happy!" she exclaimed with disdain. "I like to be here very much—you know I always did."

"Ah, Florence! you like our company," I ventured to remark.

She looked out of window as she answered:—"I like everything about every one of you; but, Jenny, I will thank you not to begin that odious habit of playing on words, or you will drive me away by vexatious gossiping insinuations."

There was silence for some little time. She busied herself with arranging my flowers. At last she came behind my chair, and laying her hand fondly on my shoulder, said—"Poor little lonely, sorrowing Jenny! you are very patient. But do

you know I have made a proposition for your benefit? and Mrs. Wilson consents. You must know that when Mr. Graham comes, he has taken a fancy to read aloud: now I don't see why this is not as good as the parlour; and you would be the better for rousing and amusement; so if—if he comes this evening, you may expect us all."

"Does he read well?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't exactly know—I dare say he does; you will judge for yourself." And she left the room before I could catch a glimpse of her face; but it was not needed. There was another countenance I longed to watch; and, as the hours passed by and evening came—the time when this reading was to begin—I became thoroughly impatient: it seemed as if so much depended on what I should observe in those searching, powerful eyes.

The muslin curtains waved slightly in the pleasant breeze, which came laden with mignonette scent. My little room had been "redd up," and looked its best. The Barton trees quivered and gleamed in the setting sun-rays, and the rooks were finding their roosts and clamouring eagerly.

Florence had seated herself rather behind me on

a low chair, when the expected "rap-tap" caused us both to start a little.

It was the first time that I had seen any one, except Florence, since my illness. I was still very weak and nervous; instead of looking at him, I felt he was looking into me—yes! looking through and through me. I did not even see his greeting of Florence; and as it was a silent one, I was obliged to defer my intended scrutiny.

After some pleasant remarks, he asked if he was to read, as arranged the evening before.

My mother put on her spectacles, "trying hard to be an old woman," as Mr. Graham said, and began to work; and then we had "Othello!"

I am not going to describe his reading—I am not going to try even to remember the passing remarks; I cannot even dwell on my mother's very touching and naïve interest in the play; but her involuntary exclamations of distress, or pity, or love, must have been the reader's best reward. We said nothing, Florence and I. Her side-face was turned to him: she never once looked that way; but not a quiver of her lip—not a breath—not a movement of her fingers, which certainly were often clasped tightly together, and then played nervously with one lock of her long hair—nothing escaped him. It was

one of Florence's peculiarities not to like needlework, especially when she listened to reading.

On following evenings we had scenes from other plays; and sometimes Milton was taken down—in fact the reading prospered; and the love—?

I hesitated, feared, doubted; then believed; then impatiently confessed to myself the impossibility of understanding him—of stringing together looks, and tones, and rumours, and reports.

Mr. Graham gave gentlemen dinner parties very often. There was now and then a shade on my father's face when asked about these. I was sure something did not please him. And one day, after hearing my mother's enthusiastic account of Mr. Graham's reading, he muttered behind the newspaper—

“ Well, I wish no harm may come of it: Lady Templar has her eyes open, at any rate.”

Much as my father evidently liked Mr. Graham's conversation and society, he never encouraged him to break through the habit or rule of our house. In other houses I heard it spoken of with pride, and as a peculiar compliment, that he walked in and out as he liked. Now this was a thing my father never liked. Hospitality he admired and followed to the extent of his means; but domestic privacy was, in

his eyes, too sacred a thing to be disturbed. Our street door did not open from without. My father maintained that it was worth a servant's trouble to open to visitors, and that over-much familiarity never consolidated friendship. He did not like the notion of being subject to any one's dropping in on him without notice. No need for a smart footboy or man-servant: a tidy maiden with a clean white apron could open the door for any nobleman—and such we always had, ready to usher in our friends, and to give welcome to some of them, with her broad, rosy smile of greeting.

We never had that extreme intimacy I have seen with others, leading to a perpetual running in and out, with any one out of our own household; consequently, we were exempt from those petty, worrying bickerings or quarrels which are so common among so-called friends and neighbours in a country town.

I now observed that instead of encouraging greater intercourse, my father rather drew back, with respect to our Nabob. My observing faculties were all sharpened with regard to him just now; and I failed not to add this to my stock of small information. I was not so sure as I wished to be that Mr. Graham was more and more approved and respected, the more he was known. There was

a half-and-half kind of mystery about his household and style of living at the Grange. And yet it was only on further acquaintance that one learnt to appreciate his powers, his thoroughly agreeable conversation, his kindness and good-nature, and his peculiar charms. Certainly, without doubt, he stood alone, a little above others, as the—what shall I call it?—the favourite—the ‘favoured guest and partner, with womankind. I believe he made havoc among tender hearts.

There was, among a certain set, no small pulling of caps about him; and his notice—a few well-chosen words with his penetrating, eloquent voice—caused many young blooming buds, just on the verge of society, or “coming out,” as it is called, to tremble and blush, and feel flattered, if not more deeply touched. Our young squires had to look to their arms. Some were sarcastic and jealous, others quietly yielded the precedence, and were content to follow in his wake. Meanwhile, he went on his own way, apparently independent of all rivalry, criticism, or gossip.

CHAPTER XII.

OLD RHYMES.

WHEN Lady Templar returned, our readings ceased ; for although Florence came often to see me, she could not leave her mother entirely : besides, there was constant company at the Barton, and I heard that our " reader " was generally one of the invited guests. I was again allowed to come down-stairs and drive out in the chair, but I was often glad to seek solitude in my " den," as Florence called my room.

One afternoon, I had been feeling particularly depressed and melancholy. The air seemed heavy and threatening. My old nurse, who was fond of a chat, came into my room.

" Miss Jenny, my dear, do you know they say as how that Mr. Graham has bought the ' Lady Water ' estate ; and for sure and certain he has given orders, they say, to have a fine new road

cut right through the Coach and Horses. The Lord protect the Templars!"

"What can that have to do with the Templars, Nurse?"

"Don't ye see, Miss, no good ever comes of disturbing old things like that? Haven't ye heard tell, that they rocks were the very coach and horses of that Sir Hugh Templar who strangled his brother as he lay sick in his bed? and as how the coach in which he rode, and the beasts which drew him on his wicked errand, were turned into stones? Ay, sure! and scores upon scores of times I have heard my good father say—

"Whensoever that coach is moved from its place,
There 'll be sorrow and woe to the Templar race."

"Nothing but old women's tales!" said I, "fit for a Christmas fireside!"

"Ay, well—ye 'll see, Miss Jenny," said Nurse, in rather an offended tone. "Howsoe'er, I've known old women's tales come true afore now!" and she left me.

The doggrel rhyme rang in my ears; and as I sat gazing at the Barton, something of my childish awe and superstition crept over me. A loud clap of thunder roused me from my dreams, and the violent storm which followed accounted for the depression I had

felt. It was a fearful storm ! Our church steeple was struck, and much injured. One of the large lime-trees in the Barton avenue was shivered from top to bottom. Fortunately, my father was at home ; but how dreadful, I thought, must be such a storm for those at sea !

A few days after the storm, I was spending the evening at the Barton. It was Florence's birthday. The extreme beauty of the evening tempted us to linger and stroll about the garden ; but for some time she was restless, and found it too hot in the sun and too cold in the shade. We were soon joined by Mr. Gordon Graham ; and whatever doubts I had before, on one subject, that evening dispelled them. There was no mistaking the kindling of his eye ; his very agitation and unusual nervousness, and his fits of silence—all told the same tale. I tried to leave them ; but wherever I went, Florence followed : she seemed to come under my wing like a frightened bird that evening.

I had made a wreath of flowers, and had placed it on her head ; now it was rather faded, and I said so.

" Oh, how silly, to think of putting it on me, Jenny ! " she exclaimed, pulling it off rather petu-

lantly. "Don't you know that every flower dies after being a moment on me? Even a bouquet goes to pieces in my hand!"

"Do you believe in omens?" asked Mr. Graham.

She coloured brightly as she said "she did not exactly know—perhaps she did; but at all events she was vexed to find that all the slips and cuttings that she planted, died: whereas, Jenny's were sure to flourish."

He said something very beautifully, and in his peculiarly happy way, about the flowers withering in the sun's ray—I cannot remember the words; and then they sauntered on, thinking, no doubt, that I should follow. I preferred sitting under a tree.

What an evening that was! so serenely blue and calm! And scarcely had the sun gone down behind a bank of dark, mysterious-looking clouds, than the moon rose—not in her usual pure cold colour, but like a glowing ball of fire, barred with one singular dark line of cloud. Higher and higher rose the moon, and the cloud rose too, becoming more wavy and smoke-like, till at last it did not require much fancy to imagine it a huge snake.

Bats hovered and flapped about, and a gray cat was stealthily gliding along—now behind shrubs,

now darting across the path before the two, whose steps on the gravel I heard, though at this time my favourite music filled the air—the thrilling church bells!

They kept in the shrubby path, and I had nothing to do but to wait and watch. Ere long the sky was covered with clouds, drifting away as if hurried and angry; and the wind rose in fitful gusts—now sighing round the old home, now sending the fallen leaves on a wild dance.

I was doubting whether to go in or wait yet longer, when they came to me.

“You are cold, Jenný; how pale you are!” remarked Florence in a quivering voice not usual to her.

“It is chilly,” I said; and then we all three went towards the house. He held in his the hand that rested on his arm.

On the steps we still lingered a moment—perhaps to watch the clouds cross the moon—and then Mr. Graham repeated some Italian poetry; I understood enough to know that it was a love sonnet. Before it was finished, he checked himself rather suddenly, and then said—

“I have tried my hand at a translation of these

lines; I should like you to give your opinion of them. I will bring them to-morrow—may I?”

I did not hear her answer. We went in, and I returned home.

Ah, that morrow!

CHAPTER XIII.

"THE MORROW."

FLORENCE came to me very soon after breakfast. She had been in tears, and was rather agitated. After some little time she stopped suddenly in the midst of some commonplace remark. "I have had such a scene, Jenny! I am come away, being frightened at the sight of the rooms there!" Then changing her tone to one less scornful, she added—"My brother has written to me—it seems that he met—Mr. Graham knew Edward in town—in fact he wrote to beg me to use my influence, which he heard was great, to bring about a reconciliation; assuring me that I should like my sister-in-law."

"And you tried?" I asked.

"Yes! Lady Templar has been so kind of late, I thought I would break the resolve I had once made, and once more interfere in domestic matters. I have learnt my mistake!"

"Yet I really thought, Florence, you had influence. I am sure your mother seems very fond of you!"

"She is proud of me!" she answered, sighing, and taking a few steps up and down the room.

"Oh, Jenny! I want to be loved!"

Tears were in her eyes, as she repeated in a tremulous voice—"loved!"

"And are you not loved, Florence? You know you are! not only by me, and others—but—surely, Florence, you felt you were last evening?"

With her head turned from me, in a low, choking voice, pausing between each word, she answered—

"I don't know!"

"I do then!" I exclaimed quickly and incautiously.

No sooner had I said the words than I wished them recalled. She seized my hand—kissed it—wept over it—"God bless you, Jenny! Bless you for that! If you say so, it is true—true—and to-night—O Jenny, perhaps this very evening I shall know it!"

"I hope so, Florence, I hope so!—surely it must be so," was all I had time to say; for a servant came to tell us that Miss Templar had been sent for.

She gave me a hearty kiss, and said, with a smile,

"that though the morning had been somewhat stormy, she hoped the evening would be bright;" adding, "she supposed I should come into their garden."

Florence had not left me long, when my mother came in with a face perfectly aghast.

"My dear! I assure you I saw Charles Sutton go in at the Barton gates ten minutes ago! I am perfectly certain it was Charles! What in the world made him go there? How came he here at all?"

"Didn't he say he might do so?" I asked. But my mother didn't hear: I spoke low, feeling rather faint. I had been stuffing lavender bags, and perhaps the scent had been too powerful for me.

"Well, Jenny, it is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard! Nothing but surprises to-day! and if it is Charles, how unlucky! for your father has been sent for to Brenton on a consultation, and can't return till to-morrow evening. Mr. Graham very kindly insisted on his going with him, in his carriage and pair. Mr. Graham was going there on business for a few days, he said."

"Mr. Graham! Then he won't be here—there, I mean—this evening?"

"At the Barton, I suppose you mean? Ah, well, I am not so sure he will propose to Florence after all. He is very agreeable certainly; but your father doesn't think so much of him as he did—and they say he is so ambitious—and there is Lady Bertha willing enough to have him."

My mother was at the window all this time, watching the avenue gates; but she was soon wanted elsewhere; and when she left me I moved my chair to the window, and leaning back a little, for the curtain to screen me, I could observe everyone who passed and re-passed.

In about half an hour, a gentleman appeared in the avenue. Yes! it was he! At the gate he paused—took out his watch—looked up at my window; but just as I came forward, to shake my handkerchief, and beckon him in, he hurried down the street at a furious rate.

Hour after hour passed, and he came not.

My mother sent to the inn, and to his house. The messenger returned with a twisted note to my mother, and informed us that Captain Sutton found he had not time to stay, and had ordered a chaise and four, and bribed the postilions to take him fast, as he must be at Plymouth that night.

The note ran something in these words:—

“DEAR AUNT,

“I fully hoped to see you all; but my sailing orders were earlier than I expected. However, there was a duty—a painful duty—to be performed. I posted it to this place. Tell Jenny I saw her, and *warned her*! She reviles me! I can do no more. I am feverish and tired. I wish I had seen you; but truth to tell I was scarce fit. God bless you all.

“C. S.”

“This is a mystery, indeed!” exclaimed my poor mother—mopping away her tears. “Poor fellow! I wish he had come, I am sure! But, Jenny, what had he to say to her?—who does he mean?—Florence?”

I told my mother all I knew, and repeated Charles’s former expressions.

Her answer was, that it was fortunate he was at sea; for if he had crossed Mr. Graham’s path it might be the worse for him. She was curious, and sad, and anxious all day, and so was I.

When evening came, a message was sent from the Barton to say, that Miss Templar was not able to see anyone—she was not very well; and we heard further, that Lady Templar had sent for Mr. Piper, and desired her to go to bed.

The mention of Mr. Piper turned all my mother's feelings to anger. The fact was that my father had offended Lady Templar on more than one occasion, and she had declared she would never again employ him professionally.

This breach had not extended to other members of the family at all.

Mr. Piper was a young man, generally supposed to be very ignorant, and not over wise—particularly by my mother.

As I took my evening's airing in our own garden, instead of in the Barton grounds, sad and melancholy thoughts weighed on me. What would be the effect of Charles's words? Was she ill from agitation?—and why had not Mr. Graham made every business give way to such an engagement as that made the night before?—would he trifle with her?—or was he in truth a bad man?—and would she refuse him and break her own heart?

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LOVER'S LEGACY.

MY mother was out paying visits when my father returned, a day later than expected. I was at work in the parlour, I remember, and my youngest brother was mending his fishing-line. It was a delicious autumn day, and I was hoping to go to the Barton, and, in fact, rather expecting Florence to come or to send. How everything—every little circumstance and arrangement—is impressed on my mind!—even to the high blue vase which stood on a side table, in which Mr. Graham's last gift of flowers still looked fresh and lovely.

My father did not come in a carriage, or on horseback; he walked in, and with his hat on stood at the door. What made him stand there silent and grave?—would he never move or speak? We seemed all three turned to stone; my brother sat staring with open mouth, with the line suspended.

"Father!" I gasped.

"Where is your mother?" he interrupted, still not moving, and speaking in a low, subdued way.

"Gone out—gone to call on several people!"

Something at that moment caught my father's eye (he was looking toward the window). He hastily turned, shut the door, and soon I saw him crossing the street. A man on horseback was standing by the Barton gates. My father went up to him, stroked the horse hurriedly, and was evidently in eager talk.

"It is Mr. Piper!" I exclaimed. Then, as a sudden thought shot through me, I jumped up, clasping my hands and crying, as my brother afterwards told me, "Florence is ill! Florence is ill!"

My father re-crossed the street with slow, deliberate steps, graver than ever. I could bear no more. As he came into the passage I met him, and grasping his hand tried to say, "I know she is ill—tell me!"

"My dear child, calm yourself. Jenny, I believe you to have strength of mind—I implore you not to agitate yourself." All this time his own hand shook more than mine did.

Then there was a shuffling of feet at the door, and in an instant my mother rushed in, almost running against us in her hurry.

"Oh, Mr. Wilson! I am so glad! Oh, Heaven! have you heard?"

My father pointed at me. "Yes; I was just telling Jenny. Your friend, my dear, is very ill—very ill indeed."

Here I burst into tears, which relieved the faintness I before felt, and in a few moments I was seated by my father's side. This is what I heard:—

Charles—my cousin, Charles Sutton—had determined on seeing Florence, having something on his mind which he felt bound to tell her. At the risk of being left behind and getting into a scrape, he had posted from Plymouth, travelling all night. He did see her. No one knew what had passed.

He hurried back as he had come, and was just an hour before the critical moment of sailing. He was now ill with—with small-pox. Small-pox had broken out in his ship—no uncommon event in those days.

Was she—the loved, the cherished, the beautiful—was she laid low with this foul disease; and had *he* done it?

Oh, we had reason to bow down our heads—to mourn and weep. She had this dread disease. He had done it.

There stood the quiet, gray old Barton, looking so solemn, and still, and impassive; and the rooks—how I hated them that day! And then I shut my eyes, and fancied a tall, stately ship riding on the waters, unfurling sails and heaving anchor, and a firm voice giving orders, little dreaming of the truth.

It was a weary, anxious day. My mother entreated my father to volunteer his services; she was convinced that Mr. Piper was incapable. My father did not contradict this; indeed, I never before saw him so grave and so anxious. When in the house, his eyes wandered out of window, and he seemed glad to make excuses to go out and call on patients.

An hour after midnight there was a loud peal at the surgery bell. This was no unusual thing; yet now I sat up in my bed to listen. Yes—I heard the words “Lady Templar.” They had, then, sent for him—there might yet be hope! Yet I well knew it was only great peril that would cause Lady Templar to give way, or to break her word.

It was like my father, to come to my door and say, “I am going to the Barton; you shall hear soon: I will send you word if I cannot come.”

He returned for breakfast. It was nearly as bad

as it could be. In answer to my mother's urgent questions, he could not help letting us see how entirely wrong he considered Mr. Piper's system. But life was at stake, and my father broke down etiquette. Mr. Piper was offended, and had left with threats of vengeance.

My father was much concerned at Lady Templar's way of treating him. He was surprised altogether at her lack of composure, and want of presence of mind. She was like a distraught woman, he said, wringing her hands—lamenting loudly, and unable to be of any use. In fact, my father said a good nurse was wanted, and he had sent for Mrs. Landon. I shall never forget my mother's face—her mute appeal. It was understood. Yes, she would have watched day and night with any sick person. My father laid his hand on her head, his eyes looked very much as if there were tears in them: "Look at them, wife," he said, pointing to myself and my brothers. Then he added, "I can depend on Mrs. Landon's judgment and vigilance."

And where was Mr. Graham? Did he know? Yes; he heard the tidings when my father did: he had turned very pale, but said nothing. He had sent to the Barton to make inquiries, and was at the Grange, having visitors staying in the house.

CHAPTER XV.

A WRECK.

It was a stormy day; the wind was so high that it was an amusement to my little brother to watch the people breasting it. The last green leaves were hurried after their fallen brothers, and our garden was sadly spoiled. But there was joy for one moment on that day, for my father pronounced Florence to be out of danger. Life was granted—Florence would not die. I thought of nothing else. I sought my own room to give vent to the overpowering feelings of relief and thankfulness. And the sailor—how had he fared? Had he escaped?—would he live to hear the awful peril, and the merciful escape? She would recover—take up again the thread of life; would it be still unbroken? That warning—would it not return? Were Charles' words her nightmare, drowning the sweet music of

Italian verse, and the whispered promise of that morrow?

“Jenny,” said my father, one day, after a weary, weary time of suspense, “will you see Florence?—Stay, my dear,” he added, “stay! Has it never struck you?—are you at all prepared?”

How was it that idea had escaped me? It was indeed a blow—a crush to all the bright hopes and fancies I had again cherished.

“She is altered very much,” said my father.

“Does she know? and what does Lady Templar say?”

“She does know. She called for a glass, looked at herself, and fainted. I have tried to talk to her, but it needs a more skilful and more tender hand to touch the wound. You shall go Jenny. Lady Templar,—ask you? I hardly think she is a woman—far less a mother! She refuses to see her child; wishes her dead; and is now shut up in her own room, scarcely taking any nourishment. Unhappy woman!”

I gathered also that poor Florence had refused all medicine or food, and that my father was obliged to exert his authority; it was only from his hands that she would take anything. Happily he was not

one of those who confine their prescriptions and remedies to the body. What his own soul was full of, he imparted to his patients. That it was the hand of a Father that pressed on them was ever kept in sight; that sickness and health, life and death, alike came from God, was implied in his every word; and it had been doubly so with the stricken Florence. In after years she acknowledged the gentle and wise teaching.

So I prepared for the meeting. I gathered all the flowers the wind had spared, and with a very trembling heart found myself outside her door. The nurse answered my knock, with the hushed tread suitable to a sick room. She silently beckoned me in.

That room!—the “bower,” as we had playfully called it—with its choice furniture, its air of luxury and comfort. A low voice murmured—(ah! how low, yet sweet as ever)—“You may go down, Nurse.”

There, in the high, carved bed, with rich velvet hangings, buried out of sight she lay; the little table with its paraphernalia of glasses and cordials, &c., stood near, and an easy chair was close to the head of the bed; I sat down in it. Her face was to the wall; but she extended her hand. Then

I knelt; and all I could do was to stroke that thin worn hand, and try to subdue my sobs; while the bed shook with her convulsive efforts to be calm.

It was long before that silence was broken. She spoke first,

“Tell the truth, Jenny! Is it quite of your own free will you are come?” Before I had power to answer, she drew away her hand, and waved it wildly to and fro—“No, it cannot be! go—go! I will see no one. No one shall see me!”

I cannot repeat what I said; but I must have assured her of my love, my exceeding happiness at being again with her. I felt that dear as she had been to me in her pride of beauty, now she was dearer than ever. I wept and spoke, soothed and entreated her by turns. Then I put the flowers into her hand.

“Take them away! Do you wish to mock me? I shall never like anything beautiful again. All ugly things belong to me now.”

“Then Jenny may hope to find a place,” said I—at the same time kissing her hand.

“Ah, Jenny!” and she burst into tears, “I did not mean that. Be my friend, dear Jenny; I sadly need one. But you don’t know how wicked I am—how cross and ill-tempered. It will not be easy

to love me now—even for you!” and forgetting herself, she suddenly turned and looked at me. Thank God! I did not betray myself!—no; I quietly gazed on that dreadful wreck—though how I did so, I know not; for oh, it was worse, far worse, than I had ever imagined! There was not a feature or line as it had been. The long eye-lashes all gone!—but I cannot describe it.

I was thankful that for the time she had forgotten herself; and as she looked at me, with the tears trickling over her face, she said in her sweet way—

“How was it, Jenny, that you could always love everything beautiful—particularly in persons? Did it never make you repine, and feel discontented? But oh!” (and her voice rose to a mournful wildness) “what is your trial to mine?—I—I, to live to be loathed!—God have mercy on me!—but the sting—the sting it is! That evening! Yes, all through my illness it came before me, and comforted me. And now—now, all is gone! Do you think?” she added, excitedly—“answer me truly! Is it possible? If *he* had been in my case——? Answer me, Jenny!”

Oh, Florence! what could I say?

She let me weep with her. She asked no more: my silence answered her.

I had wished her good-bye, and was leaving the room—"Jenny!"—her voice was husky; she took my hand, pressed it hard, in a sort of gasping silence, and I felt one hot tear on it—"Jenny, where is he?"

I had heard, that morning, that Mr. Graham had left for London, and was expected to be away for some time.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MEETING AT "OLD JOHN'S."

WE heard nothing of Cousin Charles. It was a wearing time of torturing suspense and painful anxiety. It seemed to me as if my life had been put on some years, as one may move the hands of a clock. In many ways I had been child-like in my habits and tastes in a peculiar way for my years. Now, the ordeal of seeing others suffer, put away childish things. I felt strangely full of experience.

Letters from us all were written and directed to some distant port, where we were told it was possible that Charles might receive them. It was hard to send such cruel tidings, and know that he must read such words alone and away, with no one to cast so much as a look of pity on him. My father, with his usual love for the simple truth, insisted on no reservations being made in false, timid pity for his

feelings. So the wreck of his idol was plainly told.

O Charles ! I knew—I felt so sure that if you had been the favoured—the accepted one—but this is idle. What my feelings were then, I could not, if I would, explain. There was the feeling of a great horror—the sound as of many waters—ever in my head ; and it was a merciful Hand that found active work for me, and roused me from self-contemplation, not only to feel but to act for another.

Lady Templar herself desired my presence continually, and during meals. The only time she and her child met, it appeared as if a third person was a relief. Few words passed between us, and I observed that Lady Templar avoided looking at her daughter. The cold, stiff silence froze one's very appetite. The studied ceremony and formal courtesy which Lady Templar substituted for cordial affection, in her manner towards Florence, petrified me. And the room, how gloomy it seemed to me !—a smaller kind of back dining-room, with a very subdued light : wainscotted with dark oak, and hung round with grim, ghost-like portraits of the Templars !

It was sometimes more grievous still, to be with Florence in her own sitting-room—to see that once

beautifully rounded and graceful figure, shrunken and emaciated, crouching—as she was now wont to do—rather than sitting, with her thin fingers covering her poor scarred face; the room only half lighted, for she turned with a shudder from sunshine, loathing all occupation, quite bent and wasted with misery!

For days together she did nothing, said nothing. Then came hours of irritable excitement, when she would pace the room like a caged tiger, sometimes weeping violently. One afternoon, when we returned from the dining-room, she suddenly threw her arms round me.

"Oh, Jenny, Jenny! why was I born? Oh, that I could lie down by Fanny! My own mother turns from me in disgust; and—and—he—by him——O God, I *cannot* bear it. I cannot live!"

Longing, yearning to comfort her, I knew not what to say. At last I murmured something about her using very strong expressions.

"Strong! Haven't I seen?" she exclaimed vehemently—"felt? And you, too, have seen, and can't deny that Lady Templar does—and now—you don't know, but I have seen——Oh, it was bitter!—bitter!"

Then in hollow, sepulchral tones, slowly and with

effort bringing out each word, with her face once more hidden on my shoulder, she added—

“ I will tell you. I met him—yesterday. I went to old John’s cottage, as you know, to take him that stuff—the only dwelling I have set foot in. Extraordinary!—*he* was there. O God! I saw him! He saw me! He knew me!—perhaps by the carriage. He bowed first. Then he took my hand. Jenny, Jenny! that touch went into my very heart—no, into my soul, which cannot die. He looked into my face, Jenny! as you know he does; and—and—he couldn’t help it, but I felt the start—I saw—I saw his look. I ran away. Would to God I could die! Oh, Jenny, Jenny!”

* * * * *

As long as I live, I shall hear that voice—that bitter, wailing cry!

My father was seriously anxious about her. That restless agitation, and extreme dejection—the sleepless nights, and utter want of appetite, or interest in any one thing. He spoke to Lady Templar. At first she heard him with stately pride and cool composure, but at length her lip quivered, and her words seemed to hiss out between her closed teeth, as in a stifled voice she said—

"Dr. Wilson! the whole, irresistible bent of my nature is to love beauty and to hate ugliness or deformity. My first question, on the birth of each child, was—Is it perfect?—is it good-looking? And I have not been disappointed. Good looks were inheritances from both sides of a long line. Dr. Wilson! with regard to this—to my daughter—I had far rather she had died! I cannot thank you for the result of your skill. In such cases, I think the physician would be more merciful to——"

My father interrupted her here with stern reproof, which for the moment brought a flush of colour to her rigid face; but she went on again, as if not heeding him.

"Beauty is the Templar inheritance. I cannot look upon her as a Templar. I repeat, I wish she had died."

"Lady Templar! it is my duty to remind you that, unfortunately, there is also another inheritance. It is my duty to tell you, that my deliberate and firm opinion is, that there is every danger of your afflicted child falling into what even you may consider a worse state. If she is not roused, and that speedily, I foresee the most awful consequences. Measures must be tried at once; there is no time to

lose. Perhaps change of air, and total change of scene, might be of service."

A short silence followed, and then she asked—

"Is there any chance, that with renewed health and vigour of body, the—the—fatal mischief may be repaired, or in any degree lessened?"

"I can hold out no such hope; yet I do not know that better health and time may not avail something."

Another pause. Then she rose with all her usual dignity.

"Well, Doctor, your suggestion shall be attended to. Miss Templar shall have both change of air and of scene. No expense shall be spared for the unhappy girl. Miss Templar will be rich, Dr. Wilson; her beauty was not her only dower. We must do what we can to repair her looks—all that money can do."

"Ah, my lady!" interrupted my father; "money is after all a poor thing in such a case. Alone, it can do nothing; but if backed by affection and sympathy, may be turned to use. She must be tenderly treated, or——"

"Enough! Miss Templar shall be cared for, sir! I thank you for your advice," she said haughtily.

On my father's leaving the room, she added—

"Perhaps, Doctor, you will not object to allowing your daughter, for whom Miss Templar has a good deal of attachment, to accompany her to Baston, or some other sea-place. Miss Wilson would of course share in every attention and luxury my daughter has."

After consulting my mother, a consent was given, and I heard that it was settled for Florence to go at once to Baston, a bathing-place about ten miles from Templar Cross, and I was to go with her. I had never seen the sea! and my companion was to be Florence!

She heard of the plan with passive indifference, and sat silent and still while we packed her things. Vainly I tried to induce her to choose out any books or work.

"Do as you like—I care not," was her only answer to every question.

The evening before our departure, I was sorting my work-box and listening to my mother's advice as to how we were to provide at Baston, where there was no market and no shop, when a well-known and peculiar knock at the door made me start. We imagined Mr. Graham to be in London; but no, his full-toned voice was asking for Mrs. Wilson, and in another moment he was in the room. It was

the first time I had seen him since Florence's illness. There was, I thought, a whole volume of expression in his silent, prolonged pressure of my hand; and I knew by his earnest, keen gaze, that he was reading all the history of the last month, as far as I could tell it. I felt that he read, as from a book, every passing emotion—all my doubts of him—my hopes and my fears.

"Yes, I have been in London," he answered my mother. "I returned only yesterday; but last week I was here—in the town. I was coming to see you all, but——"

A long pause, and a thrill in the voice, which made my heart beat as he resumed.

"I fully meant to see you, but I went to old John about some apple-trees; and——"

A long sigh alone finished the sentence. I understood, but neither he nor I could say more.

My mother, not seeing his hesitation, went on to speak of Florence.

He did not answer: he took a turn up and down the room, and then drew his chair close to mine, and said in a low voice—

"You are going with her to-morrow, I hear. I am rejoiced at that arrangement. I am sure that we—that all who are interested for her, will trust

implicitly to your judicious care. You will gently rouse her from dejection, and impart to her some of your own special gifts. I am sure you will support her, and have gentle patience to await the coming of that day when the bitterness of the trial shall have passed."

He spoke in the tone of one commending her to my care, as if she were his, in some way. Then, without noticing my answer, he exclaimed, with the deepest yet half suppressed feeling, "Good God! *what* a trial!—I told you I saw her?"

"She told me so," I answered.

"Did she—did she? What did she say? Did I—I hope my manner did not betray the utter shock it was. I knew she was there. To tell you the truth, I saw her go in, and purposely followed. I thought I was prepared—but good heavens! I almost wish I had not seen her!"

"Florence is fully prepared for shocking every one; if any thing she magnifies it: she needs comforting."

"And what a privilege," he said, speaking in a quieter tone—a tone more guarded. "What a privilege, to be her comforter, to draw out her grand mind!—for Florence Templar is a woman who must always be charming and interesting.

Her rich bloom, that most beautiful complexion, even her features may be destroyed—but she will still be peerless. Florence Templar possesses abilities—gifts which she has little dreamt of. Be it your task,” he added, bending low, and again speaking with that wondrous thrill of emotion, while he laid his hand on mine—“Be it your task, little Jenny, good and faithful friend, to cultivate and draw out what has hitherto lain hidden beneath an almost too dazzling beauty.”

During this conversation, my mother had left the room. She now returned, and other subjects were introduced.

Mr. Graham remained for supper; he was never pleasanter, though I could hear an occasional sigh and detect a tremor in his varying voice at times, and he led the conversation to grave subjects. He said he should be very little at the Grange for some time, as he had business in London; and he asked it as a special favour, that my mother would indulge him with one of her good letters now and then. (My mother's letters were the most delightful in the world.) His uncle disliked writing, and he said, holding my hand for a lingering farewell shake, “There is much I desire to know—much I shall anxiously long to hear. Good-bye!”

Another of his long searching looks, and he was gone; and I was left to wonder, to build up again the ruins of my castle, to deem it once more not impossible that he would have all that another so desired. His manner—all that he had both said and left unsaid—fascinated and charmed me into faith and trust in him. But then stole in cloudy shadows—uncertain, gloomy shapes—and Cousin Charles's warning voice rang in my ears. This, however, would be a touchstone—a test. If Mr. Graham could still prefer Florence—was bravely constant to her and appreciated her mind so as to overlook her lost beauty—then he could not deserve such a character. Surely he would then prove himself truly worthy of her.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE "LIVELY NANCY."

At the time I speak of, Bæstøen was but little frequented, and the accommodation for visitors was very poor; in fact, the habit of going to watering-places was then very rare. A couple of rooms at a farm-house, which had the disadvantage of being a mile from the sea, or two lone and very humble cottages lately built on speculation, constituted the range of choice. We were fortunate enough to find one of these cottages vacant; and there we were soon installed with Florence's waiting-maid, and my old nurse as cook and factotum-general.

It was, I remember well, a lovely and calm, though showery evening on which we arrived. Soft rain-lights gleamed over the wet moors, while the sea, in gentle, tiny silver ripples, seemed to play with, and whisper to, the yellow sands. On one side was a broad, level expanse of moor, which ended in cliffs, both high

and picturesque. On the other hand was a wild scattering of dark, black and brown rocks of every fantastic form, tumbled about in the most eerie fashion, as if to tempt the quiet waters to splash and foam, and seek out the mysterious, dark caverns among them; while beneath the pools left by the receding tide, glittered sea-weed in brilliant tints of red and green.

I can see it now vividly! I can recall almost every streak in that sunset sky. Yes, I can feel now a shadow of the intense excitement, the burden of pleasure which then weighed my young spirit down. It was my first introduction to the sea!

Florence roused herself to look, and a faint semblance of a smile came over her, at my broken exclamations of delight. She said the cottage seemed to be clean and cheery, with its borders of sea-pink, and round pebbles, and bright green paling and gate.

"It looked quiet and cheerful, though very lone; and she was glad it commanded such a good view of the rocks and sea."

This fit over, and when we were settled in, she seemed to relapse into her sad, dejected, and indifferent mood. She passively submitted to sit by my side in the donkey chair, but neither fresh tide flow-

ing in with gladsome rush and glitter, nor glowing sunsets, nor solemn moonlight, had power to move her. She looked as I pointed, but spoke no word. I dreaded to think what would be the end! And the continuous boom of the waves, night after night, falling in with an undefined feeling of sadness, oppressed me by its sullen, gloomy roar.

Now I thought of a ship struggling in the waves, and wondered what thoughts the rush of the waters brought to *him*. Then, again, my father's hints and fears for Florence, and visions of the old Sir Edward tripping up and down, followed by the man in brown, and the Templars' "inheritance," haunted me.

I seldom slept till the dawn of the morning. My thoughts seemed to go round in a circle, with frightful monotony, and the distant waves and wail of the wind was always there—always there—not loud, but perpetual! Florence did not rouse. There seemed to be a spell. I grew superstitious; and my first pleasure had subsided into mournful, sad presentiment. But a change came at last!

* * * * *

Even the lowly little sea-pinks in our garden bent and swayed to that storm! Hosts of clouds, black and angry, gathered to the combat. Long, low

shrieks from the rising wind, as it swept up the valley, through our cottage, and then spread out in wild and unchecked fury on the moors, causing even the short and cropped grass there to stand on end! The sun, now withdrawn behind dense cloud-curtains—now gleaming forth in a long streak over the agitated waters, showing afar off the white breakers, and the passionate tossing to and fro of the mighty waves, while the wind stripped them of their proud crests, and scattered them far and wide on the rocks, and sands, and moor.

The gulls screamed as they breasted the mighty wind, and sought their cliff nests. The cattle on the common gathered together in quiet affright, under stone wall or hedge. Human beings—the villagers—came to look on, with clasped hands, murmuring together and anxiously counting heads, to see if any should by chance be abroad in the boats on such an evening.

It was awful! Tumult and roar—surly waves lashing the sands and rocks—and the wonderful unseen wind—penetrating everywhere—gathering fresh strength each moment, as it seemed, and ready to rip up roots and trees, and force everything into its mighty whirlpool.

Amid all, rose a cry—a human cry! It came from

the group of cottagers under our windows—"A distress gun!"

Old Rob, with his glass, came up; and, with mingled importance and despair, announced the fact that a vessel was outside the bar.

"A vessel! What vessel? Could it be the 'Lively Nancy,' just left the neighbouring seaport with pottery?"

A few moments of suspense, a straining of eyes, to penetrate that mist of foam and splash and cloud, and then a heart-rending scream, a movement among the group, the sound of many feet in our passage, something or some one being borne in.

"It is old Nanny; her son, her only son, is captain of the 'Lively Nancy;' and that is the vessel—yonder."

And Florence was roused!

We had together watched, with breathless awe, the fearful strife; the wonderful majesty and power of the scene—so mighty—so grand—so intense, that all fear was quelled; the soul could only expand and throb and worship; for the waves of the sea are mighty, but the great God who made them is mightier!

Amidst all, I noted the lifting up of Florence—the heaving chest, the head erect, the flashing eyes.

She lived again. Florence Templar was again herself. And now, she knelt by the stricken woman, murmuring words of hope and comfort, bathing her temples, ministering to her great grief in every possible way. And then, suddenly, she came from the little room where old Nanny lay, and with her clear, thrilling voice, demanded attention. She, who had shrunk away from the glance of every eye!

"Will no one try to save them? Look! there is something besides the brig; it is a boat! Is there no one brave enough to make an effort to save the widow's only son?"

"'Tis a wisht thing, no doubt," was murmured in reply; "but no boat could live in those breakers. It is a thing impossible," pronounced Rob, with authority; "'twould be only throwing away more life."

"I have money!" cried Florence, again. "For money's sake—a rich reward—ten, twenty, thirty pounds—any sum! Will no one go? Will no one try to throw out a rope?"

A pause, and then a movement; and two stout sun-burnt fishermen came forward.

"We are willing to see what we can do."

"Are ye mad, William?" said Rob, with a tremendous frown, and shaking his glass in the man's face.

"No!" answered William, eyeing the scene firmly; "but Captain Jack, out there, did me a good turn once, and this here fellow needs money, and so he closes with the lady's offer; and for twenty pound he'll venture. So, we'll go. Any way, there's none to miss me."

He turned as he spoke, and followed by the other man, they went down some steep steps, cut in the rock, now slippery with foam, leading to a little nook where a few fishing-boats always lay moored.

I learned afterwards something of the history of these two men. The one they called William had, as he said, none to mourn for him should he perish. He had buried wife and three children in the space of two years. The captain of the "Lively Nancy" had helped him in the hour of distress, when doctors' bills and rent pressed heavily, and sickness and death were on his hearthstone.

The other man, called, as I afterwards found, Richard Wright, wanted to raise money to take him to the colonies, where some of his family already were, and where he hoped to marry and settle himself.

And now, the sharp excitement increased tenfold. The two adventurers had pushed off, and with

desperate and consummate strength and skill cleared the point, and were now on the wide and raging waters. Florence with her shawl tightly drawn round her, paced the raised terrace-work, beneath which stood a dozen or so of villagers, and old Rob with his eye-glass.

"They are gone!" screamed Florence, bending over with outstretched arms, and there was an awful hush for a second or so. Then rose a mingled cry, and Rob's dry voice said, "By heavens they are righted! and the boat—they are close upon the boat!"

Hope and fear were balanced on a hair! Now a monster wave hid all from our sight; now the black specks again appeared; and so it continued—how long I don't know, for I went to old Nanny in the bed-room. She knew what had been done. She blessed the young lady, and prayed to her God, with quiet, calm weeping.

And now half-a-dozen men rushed down to the point; one boat had reached it; two men caught hold of the rope. Five men were pulled in, but not Captain Jack, and not Richard Wright!

The storm abated towards morning, but the sun rose on a wild scene. Seaweed and thick ropy foam everywhere, and chafing waves not weary yet; but the wind had lulled, and people groped about,

picking up here a shoe, and there a shirt, and pieces of timber, black and tarred coils of rope: and at last three or four bodies were discovered; one was the widow's son, the other Richard Wright.

Florence spoke tenderly to Nanny, and there was that in the woman's tale which had powerful interest for her, and the bereaved mother's quiet, patient grief had its effect too.

Captain Jack was a dutiful son, and had risen to some eminence in the village. There was one besides herself to mourn him, his mother said. He had long been betrothed to a young woman, a dressmaker. She had been a very pretty comely lass, but a fire broke out in her father's shop, and Lizzy was dreadfully burnt. She lost the use of her left arm, and all her beauty was gone. Yet Jack remained faithful to her. This was to have been his last trip as a single man. He had waited and worked, and so had she, for Jack would not marry unless he could maintain his crippled wife and mother. "Poor Lizzy, it would go nigh to break her heart," Nanny said.

Afterwards, Florence and I often paid a visit to the churchyard, and sat by Captain Jack's grave. We also made acquaintance with Lizzy. Her face and neck was drawn and seamed by the fire. It

was rather unsightly, but she was a plain, sensible woman, not over loud in her grief; though, as she often said, "None but herself and his mother knew the worth of Jack!"

Florence did not relapse into her former apathy. She went out among the villagers and heard their tales of sorrow or joy. It is a good thing to be forced out of oneself into other human interests—to trace God's finger everywhere, and see how he draws his stray sheep into the fold, by sorrow and trial.

The pleasant, fresh air of Baston did us both good. Florence recovered strength; and her figure again became round, and resumed its soft outline—her step recovered something of its elasticity. The face, too, improved—the red spots wore away. It was very white—a dead, thick white now—and all the rich, ripe bloom gone. The nose was sharper, and the eyes less bright, but the old play of the mouth came back; and with her still rich, glorious hair—and her ever-varying expression—and her grace—Florence was still a beautiful woman, I thought. Perhaps I became used to the scars—or perhaps I was fascinated by her ways—her full, gushing voice, speaking rarely, but always to the point. With her there was no unmeaning chatter—no common-place verbiage;

you felt it was her heart speaking. Her very reserve and silence had its charm. She was now quiet and beautiful as one of those regal, white lilies—now playful and loving as a child.

I don't know if hope sprang up again in her heart, as her limbs became stronger; but I fancied that as the sea-air gave spring to her body, so did the tale of Captain Jack's love for the disfigured Lizzy revive her hope.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LADY TEMPLAR'S VISIT.

It was raining, and we could not get out at all. I had been reading nearly all day, but Florence was restless; and I was sorry to hear a succession of sighs, ever deeper and longer, and to see her in the old position—on a low seat, stooping her face on her hands.

“How fond you are of reading, Jenny!” she exclaimed at last.

“Yes—it is a great resource,” I replied.

“Well, I think I should be fond of it too. Lately I have wished for books—I have wished not to be so ignorant.”

Soon after, she went to the shelf and took down a volume of Shakspeare. We both read on in silence for some time, till I was startled by Florence suddenly throwing down her book, with a passionate gesture, and bursting into a violent fit of weeping.

I rose and went to her. The page was open at Hamlet. Then I remembered our pleasant readings, and how his voice had brought out all Hamlet's folded character—his racy remarks afterwards—his word-painting of that character. And Florence wept on. I said nothing, but I stroked her hand as it lay stretched out on the sofa, against which she was leaning.

“It does me good, Jenny—it does me good! I may weep here. But oh, Jenny!” she presently added, raising her head—“What shall I do when we leave Baston? To think of that dreadful Barton—so hard, so cold.” She shuddered as she spoke. “I have a kind of notion, Jenny, that the thick walls are slowly growing in—encroaching—till they will form a tomb, and stifle me. It is a horrid idea; I often had it lately there, they look so pitiless—so pitiless, Jenny! If I could stay on here with you, I think I could bear all; but there—the soil and the air seem so hard and frozen, as if sorrow itself could not rest there! Do you remember my father, Jenny? I do!—I remember him—he was kind and gentle; and so was Fanny. They perished—went away out of this hard world. Oh, if I had but Fanny again—or if you were my sister; but there, I am so lone—so

‘frighted,’ as Nurse calls it; and I have a presentiment that I go back to fresh battles—two proud spirits together, struggling for mastery. It is fearful, Jenny.”

“What makes you think of all this—especially to-night, Florence?” I asked.

“I suppose, because Lady Templar tells me in her note to-day, that she is shortly coming here, and hopes I shall soon return. Jenny! it is horrid to dread one’s mother!”

Then she rose, shook her long curls off her face, and went to the window. The rain had ceased, and she called me to see the ripple of the light on the wet sands.

“This is a sweet spot,” she said, “but the Barton—do you know, Jenny, it reminds me of a certain cave—a classic cave. Don’t you remember *who* spoke of it? That evening!—Captain Sutton, your cousin—do you remember his answer, trying to be satirical? I never heard of the place before! It was said that no one smiled again, after once entering it. Well! do you know, I can almost fancy that of the Barton?”

I tried to laugh away her idea; but she remained pensive and grave, for the rest of the evening. All allusions to those days left her so.

A few days after this, Lady Templar paid us a visit. She came in the stately old family coach, with a powdered coachman, and two powdered footmen standing up stiffly behind.

There was quite a gathering from the little village, to whom it was as good as a show to see the grand carriage, and the mother of the rich good young lady who was living at the cottage, and was kind to poor old Nanny.

Florence was out when Lady Templar came. She had chosen to take a very long exploring walk with her maid. The excuse was to find seaweed, but I could not help fancying that she guessed what was to happen. So I received her ladyship; she was gracious; indeed, I must say, Lady Templar was ever even kind to me.

After some ordinary remarks, and an interchange of questions, she drew herself up, and with tightened lips asked if the terrible marks were at all worn away.

I answered as I thought. I spoke warmly of Florence's change for the better in everything—in health, and looks, and spirits.

"I am glad of it; but nothing can bring back her beauty! However, what I wish to say is this. I know you are fond of my daughter, and she returns

your attachment. You have influence, and I believe I am not mistaken in giving you credit for sense and discretion."

I could only bow, and she proceeded.

"Now you are aware," (oh, how hard, how metallic her voice sounded, such a contrast to her daughter's!)—"you are aware that Florence is my only child, my only child. She will be my heir. You are also aware, I presume, that except the estate of the Barton, which is entailed, I have the sole disposing of my money. I confess I had desired her to be worthy to hold it, for it is no trifling fortune. Nay, don't interrupt me. I know you have some romantic ideas. I know it is the fashion to deprecate personal beauty; but I look on it as of the first importance. But it can't be helped. What must be, must be. Florence has lost hers, which, I may say, was no common share. Her prospects have changed therefore; she can no longer be sought for her beauty, yet birth and fortune are not to be overlooked. I confess I was afraid. At first, I thought the affliction so horrible, so disgusting and revolting, that I despaired. I prayed for her death; but it seems some persons judge not as I did.

"Sir Alexander Onslow, a most excellent man, and

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an eligible match in every respect, did, as perhaps you know, propose for my daughter, and was refused. I did not then interfere. I thought it well for her to choose. She had a right to, and others appeared then as suitors, who were equals in many respects to Sir Alexander. I let it pass; in fact, I believed then that Gordon Graham would have been my son-in-law. His family is good, though latterly decayed. But he has both ability and power to raise it. That is past. I now even doubt if it would ever have taken place. I doubt his being a marrying man, or one to care for domestic life. No matter: I feel it is all otherwise settled now. Gordon Graham is a sworn worshipper and an excellent judge of beauty. His two idols are beauty and ambition! If he were ever led to think of matrimony it would be through beauty's fascination, or ambition's more powerful charm. I hope Florence is Templar enough to let the past be past, and not for one moment to rest regretfully on the failure of what she might have wished in that respect. I hope so. I should indeed indeed be ashamed of, and scorn her, if it were otherwise. I hope you have the sense and kindness to discourage all morbid regrets on her part. Let her bid him pass on from her path as easily as he

does her. Let Graham's admiration and attention be as a dream that is past."

"Poor, poor Florence!" I could not help sighing out, as she pronounced these words, with the air of a despotic queen, or like a judge uttering a sentence from which there was no appeal.

"Yes! she is to be pitied — yet she is very fortunate; for Sir Alexander Onslow has written to me, again offering his hand. His letter is very handsome—quite chivalric; he pities her, and her misfortune only makes him love her the more. He again throws himself before her as a suitor, and begs to be allowed the privilege of soothing her trial. I have expressed my sanction—my decided sanction. And now, Florence must accept him. Of course she will do so; only too glad to escape the miserable fate of living to be an old maid. Pshaw! anything rather than that for a Templar! Now, may I reckon on your support in this matter? Will you urge her to be sensible and accept him, should she require any urging?"

She fixed her cold dark eyes on me, and I trembled; but I was not afraid of her. I said, "If Florence loves him."

"We can and must dispense with all that, if

necessary," she interrupted sternly. "And it is necessary. I don't flatter you with saying that I think Florence will ever love him; but respect him she must. Marry him she shall, or I will disown and disinherit her."

"It is noble and generous of him," I put in, "and he is a very worthy man. Who knows? Florence may love him—may be won in time to love him. She yearns for love!" and I thought of her tearful eyes when we heard the tale of Captain Jack.

A footstep on the gravel path announced Florence's return.

"Remember, Miss Wilson! give good counsel!" said Lady Templar, in a hard whisper, as Florence came in fluttering and timid, and not once looking up. The mother touched her forehead with her lips, and then held out her hand, which Florence kissed; but their eyes did not meet. Once only I noticed Lady Templar glance anxiously at her, and there was a glow immediately on her face, and a quivering in the lips. She would perhaps, as she said, have felt less pain to see her child dead!

The horses were fed and rested, and Nurse pumped out all the news she could out of the powdered flunkeys, and Lady Templar had explored

our garden and seen our pet view, and discussed an early dinner, while a string of formal constrained common-place observations and remarks just kept up the form of conversation ; and then, to our relief, the stately carriage and fat sleek grays once more stood before the low green gate, and Lady Templar rose to go. She was a little embarrassed ; certainly she was rather less composed and cold than usual, when she put a letter into her daughter's hands, and said, " I leave your friend Jenny Wilson to talk over this with you ; and I expect—I hope for—I demand a proper answer."

A strange light flashed into Florence's face, an agitated nervous movement came over her, at these words, and Lady Templar observed it, and for a moment it evidently upset her composure ; for in her hurry she forgot her fan, and called me " dear."

Was it that the proud, determined woman knew there was to be strife and struggle between her and her last child ? Was it that she knew she had not the meek, yielding Fanny to deal with, but a spirit as haughty and firm as her own ? Did she shrink from the encounter with the one who had been her favourite child ?

These questions I asked myself, as I sat on a

stone seat in our garden, leaving Florence alone with her letter. I wondered if she would yield. I wondered, too, a little, on the difference between us—so many asking her love!

CHAPTER XIX.

TWILIGHT TALK.

NOTHING was said about the letter—we were both shy of the subject; but Florence was again very sorrowful, and very grave—and I observed she went no more to Captain Jack's tombstone. I feared that some of the old indifference and despair was again stealing over her.

It was about the third or fourth evening from that of Lady Templar's visit, and I was meditating a plunge into the subject which I well knew occupied us both. It was a sweet, calm evening, at the hour I always love best—the gloaming, as the Scotch call it.

Our parlour had two windows: one, a bow, looked out on the broad sea, and the sands and rocks; the other looked up the wooded valley, in which the cottages were dotted about. On the highest and most conspicuous point stood the church tower, grouped round by tombstones. With the aid of a glass, I could distinguish the newly-made graves of the drowned men.

It was a quiet, peaceful hour. A low, very distant hum of voices reached us, and the gentle tinkling of a cow-bell. The waves were flowing in softly, with glad, joyous murmurs, over pebble and sand. The harsh, bald rocks were veiled by the spirit of the hour—that gray, dim, calm spirit which pervades everything, after the sun is gone. I love twilight! Then is the time for rest and thought—for old memories—for calm looking onwards: then is the time friend can speak to friend, in the still leisure of the dim light, under cover of that kindly veil which hides the varying colour, or the rising tear.

I was thinking at the moment of the one star, which had just appeared. I believe I was recalling the interest which I had heard sailors take in every sky effect, and wondering if in the gorgeous tropical sunsets they did not miss our sweet twilight, when I felt a hand on my shoulder, and Florence bent down and gave me a long, long kiss on my forehead.

“A penny for your thoughts, Jenny!”

The voice was tearful—I heard that at once—and, coward-like, I avoided my dreaded foe, and rushed into an elaborate description of my reverie, ending all with—

"You know I have often heard Cousin Charles say all this."

"By the way, Jenny, did you ever hear"—she paused and cleared her voice, then went on rapidly—"Did you ever hear that your cousin came to see me?"

"Oh, Florence! did I hear? Oh, don't let us talk of that!" I said.

"But did you hear—I must talk, Jenny" (in her impetuous way). "Did you hear, I say again, that he came to tell me—in fact, he said all sorts of unjustifiable things of Mr. Graham. I was not pleased—I thought it a liberty. He was prejudiced. It was not generous. It was not like him."

"I knew he had not a good opinion of him," I said hurriedly, not daring to trust myself to notice her charges, which in my heart I resented. "But, Florence, are you—do you yourself feel quite sure he is everything right and good: as well-principled a man as—as Sir Alexander, for instance?"

It popped out like a gun! The ice was broken. I had kept faith with Lady Templar—in naming him with praise, though, it must be confessed, in a strangely awkward, ill-chosen manner.

The hands which had lingered fondly on my shoulder, or strayed in my hair, were hastily

withdrawn, as if something there had stung her.

“I know what you were going to say—what you were bid to say—what you have been dying to get out, only a true shame withheld you, for three days. Jenny! it won’t do!”

She gave a little, short, mocking, and forced laugh.

“All exceedingly heroic, and noble, and so forth, no doubt—like poor Captain Jack, you perhaps think? But he was loved by her. Lizzie had always loved Jack. And can you believe, Jenny, that I—that a woman who has ever seen Gordon Graham’s look of love—even though it be gone from her for ever—could so forget it, so utterly sink in her aspirations, as to be content,—flattered, forsooth, by Sir Alexander’s smiles and patronage? I am strangely humbled, indeed! Having once refused him, now I am to consider myself lucky—honoured, to have the opportunity of thankfully receiving the rejected boon. To come down to *him*!”

“Down! I am not so very sure of that, Florence. It may be that Sir Alexander’s noble, generous conduct, could not be found in Mr. Graham!”

To see the look she gave me!

"Indeed!" she exclaimed. "What a pity he should not know how he is appreciated in a certain quarter!—No doubt his *noble* and *generous* disposition would lead him to lay his title—that of a baronet, I believe—and his acres, and his tall person at her feet. Such amiability as his could not withstand such appreciation and admiration!"

Then, perhaps seeing in my face signs that this bitter and mocking tone really hurt me, she altered.

"I don't mean to be hard and cross, but, Jenny, pray don't take that line. Don't set up to be a philosopher; let the truth stand always between you and me. In pity leave me all I have now—my memory of the past; and, Jenny, persuade my mother!"

"Jenny!" She startled me with the abrupt change in voice and manner. "Do you know what you were trying to do? What you were lending your aid to?—to a low, mean, worldly policy—which exacts as bloody sacrifices as ever Moloch did of old—even our holiest, best feelings—our love! Rather pray—pray, Jenny, that I may be delivered from all such temptation—which, God knows, is apt enough to steal in, wherever there is money or birth to show the way. I may become hard and worldly, as

I know I am proud. Yes! I may—but let not your hand draw me on; rather let me die—help me to die—than that, Jenny!”

Then I felt keenly how far superior was Florence’s nature to her mother’s—to mine. Then I resolved, with God’s aid, to console and comfort her; but not for any consideration to strengthen her mother’s hands. Florence was right. She might still be true to her own heart; though, in this world, there was nothing for her but a thirst never to be quenched, and a company of pale and shadowy ghosts, risen from the ashes of a broken heart. But these might be better for her than that image, the world, she so truly painted. One might hope the former would, in time, turn to blessed angels, who would assuage her thirst with living water; the other must end in yielding fruit such as the death-apples of the Dead Sea.

“Forgive me, Florence!” I said. “I will not persuade you to anything but submission to God’s will. Meanwhile, do justice—even to poor Sir Alexander, who, I am sure, means well.”

She gave me her hand. I felt her shiver, as if the soft air was chilly.

“I feel as if a dark cloud was hanging over me!” she said. “I am sure that a death-struggle is at

hand—and—oh, Jenny, there is a horrid thought which alarms me!" she whispered, huskily. "I feel, sometimes, as if I should yield. I am proud; I am wilful and determined; and strongly does every pulse of my heart beat against this step—yet—but it must be only a sickly fancy, engendered in lonely hours. It shall not, cannot be!—I will not be forced!"

These last words were uttered passionately; and I felt her hand burn and throb.

"Oh, Jenny! you won't forsake me? I don't know what will happen. She is determined; and so I always have been. Fanny died. But I—oh, never forsake me, Jenny, whatever comes!"

I wound my arms round her; I promised to protect and shield her; and she yielded to my caresses, like a child. I said that no one could or would force her into a marriage she disliked. I talked on in a quiet, monotonous way, hoping to soothe the shuddering which still at times passed over her frame. I said nothing of Lady Templar's threats, but only spoke of her wishes, and her natural, and not wrong, desire to see Florence married.

As I felt that she was calmer and more composed, still leaning on my shoulder—her hand, now cool,

in mine, and darkness gradually gathering around us—I felt impelled to go on—not to let the subject drop; being sure that it was more healthful for her to be able, once, to speak openly and deal with the question fairly—not to bury it alive, as it were. So I at last, by degrees, touched gently on rumours and reports that were afloat, and my own father's doubts that Mr. Graham was not quite all we fancied him, and that Charles was justified in some degree in his censures and warning.

I felt the tears, as they fell on my hands, but she did not shake me off or even raise her head.

“That is cruel, Jenny! You are cruel now, though you speak so gently. I know all is over—it is as a tale that is told; but leave me my one sole consolation. Let me feel that the only, only man Florence Templar ever loved, was worthy. I must think this. His giving it up makes no difference. Few men would marry—what I am now, for there was no engagement formed; he had not even said anything I could dare to bind him to. Ruin and destruction came just in time! Do you remember, Jenny, what he said?—what was to happen on that morrow? How I greeted the light of that day, which I thought would—would . . .” Tears stopped her words for a moment. “Do you

know," she presently said, "I believe I like him the better for being true to his own fastidious taste—his 'ideal,' as he once said. Some men might have feared the world's clamour, and have prated of honour and so forth; and the fortune, which it is well known, comes to me, is a bait, Jenny, which would be all powerful with many, even were they rich already. Yes, I respect him all the more, as it is. Oh, I can't tell you, the blending of tenderness with the horrid shock which *I felt* was thrilling through him. He could not help it!—But I ought to blush at saying all this. Little did I think ever to speak so to any one. Excuse it, Jenny. Let the subject be buried henceforth. We won't disturb the dead! And Jenny—good, patient, faithful friend—let me say now, just once, and never again, that I read you—that I know—don't shrink away, I won't hurt your feelings—but in some things you do understand me, and I understand you, as no one else can. We do feel something—in some measure alike now. And perhaps, in time, I may learn to be as patient as you, under the burden of a lonely heart. But leave me *that*, Jenny: don't take away my only resting-place. Gordon Graham is worthy!—how gifted—how fascinating—you know as well as I do! Indeed, but you are ungrateful, Jenny"—and a slight playfulness

touched her manner,—“to believe any harm of him. It was one of the first things which I liked in him, when he spoke in his beautiful way of you, and praised your ‘violet-coloured eyes,’ and likened you to a ‘fragrant flower, hidden from most people, but so well worth a search——’”

“Stop, Florence: pray don’t!” I said.

“I will stop—I must stop. I have spoken. Now then, let it pass. No more—no more! But if I try to forget—try to find a place in life—if it please the Almighty to keep me here—you must not ask me to marry Sir Alexander. Oh, that I could put that idea far from me! Whatever happens, don’t you forsake me, Jenny!”

CHAPTER XX.

BASTON PLEASURES.

It was very pleasant during that quiet fortnight which followed Lady Templar's visit. The sun shone, and the wind blew very gently, yet enough to make the high tides very glorious; and we sat and watched the dancing billows as they glittered in the bright light. It was calm and mellow, as the decline of the year always is.

Florence seemed to throw off any anticipation of evil; and under the influences of the clear, glad sunshine, became cheerful—even joyous. We avoided talking of our return to Templar Cross—I saw she dreaded it. We were eager about shells and seaweed; and Florence took sketches of all our favourite spots, which I finished up at home. Cousin Charles had taught me to draw, but I had no experience in sketching from nature. And so the time sped. And I afterwards looked back upon

it as if we had been sitting on a rock, unaware that the tide was surrounding us—that the deep, dark waters were round us, gathering danger even then!

“A carriage, Miss Jenny!” exclaimed my old nurse, one morning—“Lady Templar’s livery; so I’m thinking you and Miss Florence won’t have your promised pic-nic at the point; and, deary me! we’ve a poor larder for her ladyship: and look—see! there’s a horseman behind!”

Florence had seen the carriage, and ran downstairs. We looked out of the window together, ashamed to express our disappointment, for we had settled a pleasant expedition.

“Jenny, look! ’tis him! Oh, what shall I do—what can I do?” and Florence clasped my hand nervously.

In another moment, the carriage stopped at the gate, and Sir Alexander Onslow helped Lady Templar to alight.

I cannot tell how we met, what he said or did, or what Florence did—I was confused. He looked so large and tall in our little room; his whiskers were so black; his eyes so big, and round, and dull! But he was shy too, and kind—very kind,

I afterwards thought. He said little to Florence—all his remarks were addressed to me. He was pleased with everything: admired the view, and the paper of the room; and when the servant came to lay the cloth for dinner, he very considerably said he would take a turn round the place. I heard his heavy step in our terrace walk, and his whistle; and then stealing a glance out of the window, I saw him leaning on the low wall, looking perplexed and anxious, and evidently not thinking of the view. And I wondered if her altered appearance had shocked him—or if he read in her cold, grave manner, her unwillingness and indifference.

I never saw Lady Templar so pleasant. She was quite lively and chatty; but her eye never rested for one moment on her child. She brought patterns of damask and paper, for Florence to choose from. She intended refitting her room; in fact, she was full of kindness, and proposed our remaining a fortnight longer if we wished it. The more gracious and kind she was, the more silent and downcast did Florence become.

Lady Templar remarked on her gravity when Florence left the room, and said she hoped I would tell her of anything that her child wished for.

She knew she had a severe trial, and everything should be done to please her. She gave me carte blanche to gratify every whim, and said we need spare no expense. She also said that no one knew what a noble, kind creature Sir Alexander was. He did not care for waiting—he was willing to wait; and so nothing was to be done to hurry Florence. Sir Alexander would be a constant visitor, and she would learn thus to know and value him; and it was very likely, she added, that he might drive down and see us again another day, and bring his sister.

Lady Templar said she meant to invite some distant cousins to spend the winter at the Barton. The house was rather melancholy; she was determined to do everything to promote cheerfulness.

Of course I assented, and thought her wondrously kind; and afterwards, when we all went out—I in my chair—I began to like the tall man. There was something tender beneath the shy gruff voice, and when I saw his large inexpressive eyes following Florence's graceful movements, as she threaded the low rocks, or threw pebbles into the clear pools, and heard a low sigh, I pitied him, and almost wished he might succeed—and then I thought of Cousin Charles! I had time to think; for Sir Alexander,

though he kept by my chair, did not talk, and Lady Templar was bargaining with the shrimpers.

When they were gone, and Florence and I turned into our cottage after seeing them off, I remarked on Lady Templar's kindness. "Oh, don't Jenny—don't talk about all that to-night, please! We have one fortnight left for Baston pleasures, and don't please say anything about all that. One fortnight—fourteen days, and then . . ." A low sigh and shiver filled up the rest.

So we did not speak of the future, or of the past. We dried our seaweed, and Florence finished her sketches, and sometimes we sang together, as if no shadow lay before or behind.

CHAPTER XXI.

BREAKING DOWN.

THE fortnight passed but too quickly. We bid farewell to Baston friends, and went a round from the sailor's graves to the rocky point. And on the day and hour fixed, the grand coach arrived, and we drove away, leaving old Nurse to come after in a cart, with our marine treasures and luggage.

It was a rich autumn day—a day on which an artist might lay by his colours in despair, fearing to lay on the brilliant purple and gold which abounded everywhere. Our last look of Baston as we mounted the hill was magnificently grand. Florence leant back against the silken cushions and drew down her veil; but there was too much to delight me in every step, not to look out eagerly. I was suddenly startled out of a day-dream, by a great jerk and a stop. Then the footmen dismounted, and there was a stir and a parley.

Florence leant forward to inquire somewhat

impatiently the meaning of all this. The wheel had come off, the men at last acknowledged with perplexed countenances. A whole volley of abuse on the rough roads came clattering down from the gruff coachman on the box; but while every one talked and blamed, the fact was clear, that we must wait while Richard fetched a conveyance. The said Richard proposed mounting one of the horses, but the coachman did not like that plan.

I laughed, not greatly displeased at an adventure—a very unforeseen thing in this steady old coach.

Florence owned she would rather have gone on quietly; she was not romantic enough to relish sitting on the roadside for two hours.

I think, however, she changed her mind, when, amid all the dispute as to what was to be done, a gentleman rode up, and, to our exceeding surprise, that gentleman was Mr. Graham!

He insisted on Richard taking his mare, and riding to the Grange for a carriage. The Grange lay on this side of Templar Cross. Florence objected—fearing his mare might be hurt; but Mr. Graham did not care. “Miss Alice” always went safe; and besides, if it purchased him the unforeseen pleasure of being with us, even a broken knee would be bearable!

He proposed our going into an adjoining field, and sitting on a pleasant flower-studded bank. It was very strange ! He said he had only just arrived, and was setting off again on the morrow. There was great sadness, I thought, in his voice, as he spoke of business which would keep him in town all the winter. But he added that an idle, vegetable life did not suit him. He must work ; and now that his building was finished there was nothing to occupy him at home.

I had long known Mr. Graham to be an agreeable, fascinating man ; but never, till that day, had I seen him so much so. His voice struck me afresh, as being peculiarly beautiful. He was not only a good talker—and on this occasion his conversation was brilliant and sportive, as well as earnest and full of feeling—but he had that peculiar gift of making others talk. One always felt so very much more agreeable and clever, when in his company.

On this memorable day Florence was silent and shy. I talked for her and myself. Very little actually passed between them ; yet—if ever a man conveyed to a woman heart-homage, and showed a gentle, considerate, but deep interest, by tone and look and manner, so did Gordon Graham to

Florence Templar. She had said, "I know it is all passed for ever!"—but could she think so now?

He often broke off in the midst of a glowing description to say how happy he was at being with us again: he addressed himself to me, it is true; but he looked towards Florence.

He proposed sending a number of books for our reading; and even reminded us of a translation of some Italian poetry he was to have brought—(his voice trembling a little as he alluded to it)—he wished us to see it, and give our opinions about it.

The man and carriage returned all too quickly—so he said, and I felt—and yet, afterwards, when I was again at home—again in my own room, looking over at the old Barton—I wondered if he were true. I longed intensely for him to speak out.

I found letters from Cousin Charles on the parlour chimney-piece. He had not heard! He was relieved, he said, at having spoken the truth to Florence. He prayed me to mediate for him, to obtain her forgiveness. He spoke of her as still beautiful, but quite hopelessly as regarded himself. He alluded to the small-pox being on his ship; but that no case was fatal, or even severe. His letter was like himself—hearty and frank; only a tender melancholy

had spread its veil over every expression, instead of the merry, hopeful fun of former days.

Lady Templar kept her promise. There were visitors at the Barton, and dinners and balls talked of, with riding and driving every day; and Sir Alexander always there, maintaining his quiet, undemonstrative character, and acting up to instructions to the letter, by not being too eager or hasty.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ENGAGEMENT.

THE visitors at the Barton were Mrs. Belvoir and two Miss Belvoirs. A little, thin, witch-like woman, with sly eyes and a propensity to sniff; fond of asking questions, and avoiding giving her own opinion; clever at knowing every one's affairs; accomplished in smooth insinuating speeches: to sum up, a regular "toady." Such was Mrs. Belvoir.

Her delight at being honoured by an invitation to the Barton, after years of estrangement, was expressed in every possible shape and form. "Her dearest cousin, Lady Templar, and her dear poor dear love of a Florence," were praised inordinately; while wonderful shakes of the head, including her small yellow wig curls, and profound sighs, expressed her affliction at Florence's scarred face.

Selina, the eldest daughter, was decidedly blue, and decidedly masculine; Florence and I added to this

“decidedly cross tempered and disagreeable.” She was small, like her mother, with long sharp nose and chin, and yellow curls. Florence—happily always known by the diminutive of Flo’ (fancy *her* a Florence!)—was very tall, very slight, and had large, staring, black eyes, an uncomfortable coloured skin, and long, thick, black hair, decidedly neither fine nor glossy. She was soft, and languid, and sentimental, but quite as great a toady as her mother. From the cellar to the state drawing-room, from the attics to Florence’s own especially set apart boudoir, did these people insinuate themselves—sniffing over the cook’s work, or prying into the pantry, to the infinite disgust of the butler, or uttering exclamations of delight at Florence’s drawings and books, and all the costly fitting up of her room. They irritated her, they admired her, they pitied her, till she was fain to take refuge in Sir Alexander’s quiet and unobtrusive kindness; or if his sister was there, which she often was, Florence took refuge under her wing. Miss Onslow was an elderly, dignified, kind woman, warmly attached to her brother, who was much younger than herself. Florence liked her.

I seldom went to the Barton, and the weather was so wet, so damp, and miserable, I hardly ever went out anywhere. My father was much worked; it was such

an unhealthy season; there was a great mortality among the poor, and my mother was constantly engaged in ministering to them: we were full of occupation. Meanwhile the Barton was the resort of all the gay people in the neighbourhood. Every night its old windows gleamed with festive lights, and Florence was so beset with visitors and gaiety, that I did not see her for weeks.

It must have been six weeks from the time of our leaving Baston, that she came to see me in my own little room, having excused herself from joining the rest to a grand party in the neighbourhood on the plea of headache.

I was grieved to see her look so thin and fagged, with a burning spot in her cheeks, and an anxious, unhappy, restless eye.

“Words cannot tell how I loathe it all, Jenny! how weary I am, or how I was stung at being so dragged before the public again. But that has passed. I am callous now! . . . Jenny!”—she spoke hurriedly, and looked frightened—“Jenny! do you remember my telling you of an odd sensation I had, about the walls gradually coming nearer and nearer—slowly, slowly coming in upon me, day by day. Oh, heavens! it is so! I am oppressed. I feel ready to suffocate! But I am not mad,” she added

with a nervous laugh. "This is no monomania, only a type of what really is. It is all over with me, Jenny! it is fated! Florence is not self-willed and determined now. Oh, no! but so amiable, as Miss Belvoir hath it."

"My dear Florence, you are ill; you are feverish," I interrupted, alarmed at her strange manner.

"No, I am well. What! is it so unusual for me to be amiable and complying, that you take it to be a symptom of illness? Their chains are round me. I am bound—bound tight." And she attempted to move her arms, as if she was really bound. "I have relented!—I have indeed! God knows, Sir Alexander deserves a better wife!"

"You have, Florence? What! you marry him willingly?"

"Yes; I have deliberately settled, with selfish prudence—entered into a compact firm and fast—that I had rather trust myself to him, with my burden of misery, than—than——Why, Jenny," she added, changing her mournful tone to one of excitement, "one day Lady Templar threw off all this new manner; and when I said I could not marry him, she spoke just as she did when she turned my brother's picture to the wall; she froze me with her terrible eyes,

and she said, 'if I did not accept Sir Alexander she would throw me off for ever, with her malediction; she would turn me out of doors, a beggar; or,' she added cruelly, 'to live with Mrs. Belvoir, who is dying to have you, and who watches the issue of this affair as a cat watches its prey. Mrs. Belvoir wishes you to find a home with her: so choose between Sir Alexander and her.' Yes, Jenny, she said all this; and, on my knees, I asked her mercy, and when denied, on my knees still, I have wept and thought for hours. I have tried to rouse myself and defy them all; but I can't. No! the walls are closing on me, and I dread—oh, Jenny, you know what I dread!—you know our inheritance!"

Then, after a pause, she added—"He is kind, and says he trusts to winning my affection hereafter. He quotes his married sister as a 'case in point.' She did not love her husband when she married; but now she is very happy with him. And so I have consented. Oh, Jenny, only one thing could save me—only one—and that can't be! And do you know," she said, hurriedly, covering her face, "that day, when the carriage broke—I was not so sure—I thought—oh, what did I not hope and think?—merely because he was kind and polite—nothing

more! It was all my own infatuated folly, which could, for a second, construe a word or a look otherwise!"

All was said in a strange, quiet voice; and without change she went on to tell me how her wedding-clothes were ordered—what a fuss and stir they all made about it; but one thing was good—the detestable Belvoirs would go as soon as the wedding was over. Then she asked me to come, and inquired about my father, all in the same hushed, timid, and constrained tone; only, now and then, breaking off into a mournful, earnest entreaty—"Don't forsake me, Jenny: whatever happens, be my friend!" and once or twice, in a thrilling whisper, she said that perhaps her marriage to such a calm, kind, creature as Sir Alexander, might save her from her worst dread—that heir-loom of the Templars—"You know, Jenny!"

Alas! alas! I did know.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DR. WILSON SENT FOR.

THE approaching marriage between Sir Alexander and the once beautiful Miss Templar was now talked of everywhere, while busy preparations went on. Mr. Graham did not return to his home: report said he was much engaged and much sought in London, and a great deal with Edward Templar.

The season was unusually damp and chill. A dense unhealthy fog seemed to brood over the place; and it was fearful to note the number of newly made graves. In every street—in almost every house—was sickness and distress; only the old gray Barton seemed exempt; and thither, daily, came seamstresses and milliners and tradespeople of every description. And Lady Templar walked out proudly from the gates, on Sundays, beside her intended son-in-law, followed by the cousins Belvoir—but Florence, the bride elect, where was she?

"Tired to death, poor dear soul, with fitting on dresses and choosing jewels, and all that tiresome stuff," simpered Miss Belvoir.

"Very busy, and absurdly nervous," pronounced Lady Templar.

Ah! I saw her for a moment. I had just time to go into her room to inquire about my dress for the wedding morning. Jewels glittered on the table; chairs and sofas were covered with silks and velvets; and two maids were busy packing a large box. She was on her old low seat, bending down till her head was almost on her knees. A silent wringing of her hands—a sad, stricken, earnest gaze at me—and that was all my greeting. I attempted to whisper words to the effect that all this must not be. I said it was a sacrifice; but she shivered and said—

"Hush, it must!" She caught hold of my arm—looked eagerly into my eyes. "Does he know? Has he heard?" I said nothing. "Oh, yes, he knows!" And with a shiver she sank down again, murmuring—"It must be—it must be."

That evening, my mother and I were agreeing how very horrible such a forced marriage was, when my father came in and joined our conversation.

"What! she is still so very averse?" he asked.

"She does not love him," I answered.

"Well, all I can say is, he is more worthy of her love than others I could name. He will be a kind and considerate husband, I don't doubt."

"But you can't think it right, Mr. Wilson," exclaimed my mother, "to go to the altar without any love; in fact, loving another."

"Well, wife, there is many a slip between the cup and lip."

"Ah, it is too late now!" said I. "To-morrow, the lawyer comes to make out the will and the settlement; and then——"

A ring at the surgery bell interrupted me, and stopped the subject.

My father did not return till after I had gone to my room. I looked out as was my wont to do. Still that murky atmosphere, and wet streets—the moon obscured by a thick vapour, while no breeze stirred the Barton limes, and the smoke from the quaint chimneys could not rise.

There was much opening and shutting of the door, and occasionally I caught sight of the brilliant light in the hall. A supper-party, no doubt, I thought; but it was no unusual sight now, to see lights moving at a late hour there. The lawyer was to be there all the next morning. In the afternoon,

if my mother could spare me, I was to go and see the bridal dress.

My thoughts were disturbed by a low knock at my door, and presently old Nurse came in—hearing me still up, as she said—and wishing to know if I wanted anything. She was always glad of an excuse for a “tell.”

“There’s no saying, Miss Jenny, where the sickness will fall next; and deary me! the Almighty keep your dear father up to his work! but save us! he is overpowered, the poor, dear man. And Mr. Lilly is ill now; and sure and certain, I do believe somebody is ill over the way. There has been a great moving and stir there this hour past. It may be company, as you say; but who knows? And so the wedding is to come off next week? Dear me now, Miss Jenny, I deem it is a more likely match than it would have been with that little Nabob. Pish! I never did like him at all! A while ago, I took it into my head he was up to glamouring of you, with his grand talk and larning. Bless you! don’t look so horrified, my darling. I meant no harm. Ay, my dear, if you haven’t all the beauty of ——”

There is no need to repeat all that the good soul ran on with in her partial love of me.

To return to my story :—Nurse and I sat longer than we should, looking out on the dismal street, and wondering why they were up so late at the Barton. Then our street door opened, and my father's step was heard. We looked rather guilty at being found up at such an hour; but he did not seem to notice the light in my room. After talking to my mother, he proceeded to Nurse's room.

“ Oh my ! Miss Jenny—he's calling of me ! ” and away she ran.

It is for gruel or wine for some sick person, I thought, and then hastened to undress.

There was a little subdued stir still in the house, and then the street door opened and shut again, and all was quiet. I was soon in bed, and had fallen into a dose, when I became conscious of some one standing by my pillow.

“ Are you asleep, my dear ? ” asked my mother. “ I feared the noise would have alarmed you. ”

“ Oh no ! ” I answered, sleepily, and half turning to dose again : but I was surprised to find my mother had seated herself by me, instead of leaving the room.

Presently she went to the window, then returned to my side. “ The wedding will be put off, I suppose, ” she said, as if speaking to herself.

"What wedding, mother?" I asked, now completely awake.

"It seems her ladyship is ill. There was a supper party, and the company had been looking at all the beautiful presents Florence had received. Somehow, she refused to come down to supper, and they say Lady Templar flushed up and looked angry as she went herself to seek her, after sending those Miss Belvoirs in vain, more than once. Ah! there is the gate banging! perhaps your father is coming."

All was quiet, however, and I asked, "Do you mean that Lady Templar is ill, or is it Florence?" for I had a dread I could not express of something—I did not know what—happening to poor Florence.

"Oh, it is my lady herself, as I was saying. She went to fetch her daughter, and they say she found her weeping and wailing, like one broken-hearted or distraught. The housekeeper told your father she believed that Miss Templar had heard from her brother that morning, and that something in the letter had seemed to turn her frantic; but the letter seemed to have come mysteriously with some flowers and books from the Grange, not by the post: I don't know how this could be exactly."

"From the Grange, mother!" said I. "Nothing

more likely! Mr. Graham knows Sir Edward very well. Oh! what could it be? but go on and tell me all you know."

"I know nothing more than that Lady Templar's voice was heard raised in an excited way, and that she was some time in Florence's room. As she came out she uttered the word '*Remember!*' sternly, looking back. A few moments after, the housekeeper heard a heavy sound, and coming out on the gallery, saw Lady Templar lying on the ground. Your father was sent for. He says it is a fit. Oh, my dear, what an awful thing! Poor woman! her days—her very hours, perhaps, are numbered; for your father says it will be a miracle if she recovers."

CHAPTER XXIV.

MOTHER AND SON MEET.

THE next morning I was awoke by the church bell tolling for the dead. It had been but too common a sound of late; yet to-day it caused me to tremble. It was not, however, for Lady Templar. She still lived; and my father believed her to be conscious, though utterly unable to speak.

The lawyer was punctual; but no business could be attended to—and he drove away again. Sir Alexander, too, was seen to leave, after a long conversation with Mrs. Belvoir.

Florence had locked her door against every one, after hearing my father's opinion of her mother's dangerous state: no doubt, she needed solitude, and wished to keep out the Belvoirs. I wondered what she thought and felt; I wondered what her mother had said; and then I turned with a shuddering, sickening dread, to a report which had again reached

me—a mere gossiping rumour; but it disturbed me: it might be only from a disposition to cavil at and detract from anything good and great—it might be mere envy and jealousy—but I liked not the whispers which went round about Mr. Graham!

When my father found time to eat a hasty dinner—looking so worn and harassed as to alarm us—I heard that there was not a shadow of hope that Lady Templar could recover. From her anxious, troubled countenance, he had imagined that she had something on her mind, and had himself ventured to name her son. Poor woman! at last—on this, her hour of death—helpless, and laid low—she yearned to forgive and to see the rebellious but once favourite child. Sir Edward had been sent for, but my father doubted if she would live long enough to see him; and every opening of the door, every stir in the room, made her cast longing and restless glances. My father said that Sir Alexander had returned, and was very low and dejected; desiring much an interview with his betrothed, which she as constantly evaded on different pretexts. Mrs. Belvoir had taken upon herself to order a room for him, calling him one of the family; and there he was to remain, awaiting

the end, and doubtless wishing to console Florence, if she would allow him to do so.

From her, towards night, I received a hurried pencil scrawl, full of agitation and misery; feeling deeply and sorely that her presence in the chamber of death gave no comfort, irritated by the obtrusive attentions of the Belvoirs—who seemed to be playing some deep game—and yet, when alone, nervous and miserable. She entreated me to come to her.

This I did on the morrow evening—not being able to leave home before. I was startled and sorry to find her in such a fever of anxious excitement—listening nervously at every sound which seemed like an arrival.

“My brother, Jenny!” she exclaimed. “He is coming. If she lives to see him—Oh, God, how much hangs on that meeting!”

She was walking to and fro, as she spoke, in a hurried, disordered step.

“I feel!” she exclaimed, stopping suddenly, and uttering her words with startling solemnity—“I feel that my fate hangs on that meeting! It is very awful!” she presently added: “such a parting is awful—horrible! There is no sorrow—no gentle, affectionate sorrow—no tears!—I can’t shed one. My mother’s last words to me were—Hark!”

And she rushed to the door, listening eagerly, and signing to me to make no noise.

There was a stir below, evidently. The drawing-room door opened, and female voices were heard vociferating exclamations in a subdued tone—there were heavy, men's footsteps—and a low, deep voice saying something, which was evidently answered from without, and by one whose tones, even then and there, sounded different from others. I knew that voice; and so did Florence.

She had sunk back, and with a wild, convulsive movement of her arms, gasping out "It is he!" she fainted.

I watched by Florence till late that night. I could not leave her. She was worn and spent with excitement, and had two or three fainting fits. She fell asleep at last, under the influence of a soothing draught which my father ordered.

He told me that Sir Edward had arrived. He had been at the Grange; and when the report spread that an express had been sent for him, he appeared before the messenger could have reached anything like half way to London. Mr. Graham had driven him in. He had evidently been at the Grange for some days, staying with his friend, from whence he had written that letter to Florence, and

was perhaps awaiting the result, when a more powerful Hand, and in another way, brought about the desired meeting.

Mother and son were together now ; and I knew, while I watched on poor Florence's restless sleep, that in the death-room another had been summoned. The lawyer, who was so lately to have drawn up a marriage settlement, was now taking down the wishes of the dying, expressed imperfectly enough. No one was present but the three. There was intense silence in the old house for the space of an hour, while God's gifts of great possessions were being transferred from the dying to the living. What a responsibility that is—what an amount of good or evil hangs on the drawing out of a *will* !

The lawyer left ; and then again there was gentle moving in the passages, and whispered words ; and I gathered that the Rector was sent for. What was he to do ? Alas ! nothing ; for, as he mounted the stairs, the nurse came out to say that all was over—all over ! Dread words, I thought them then !

My mother kindly consented to my staying with my poor friend, and giving her the little comfort I could. Florence was very ill ; and, fortunately for her, my father ordered complete rest and quiet. So she

lay alone—and as it seemed, forgotten—while all the preparation for a pompous and grand funeral took place. Sir Edward had seen his sister once. The meeting brought tears to her eyes, which seemed to do her good; and I thought him very kind in manner. I hoped she would find at last some family affection to rest on.

They passed out with stately pomp—a long procession; and it so happened that Sir Alexander Onslow and Mr. Graham walked side by side: it was by mistake, and an accident; but it was much talked of.

A heavy, thick rain fell all day—a chill, cold rain, which seemed to penetrate through everything. I have cause to remember that wet day. On the morrow, I was to return home, and Florence was to go with her brother to his home, as it was decided that some change would be good for her. Of course, the wedding was indefinitely postponed. Poor Sir Alexander looked sad enough; but it could not be helped: and the Miss Belvoirs did their very best to console him.

So I said farewell to my dear Florence, as her brother gravely but kindly assisted her into the carriage; and they drove off, followed by the Belvoirs, who had contrived to get an invitation

to Thorny Park—and for whom Sir Alexander had sent his carriage.

Once more, the old Barton was deserted. When the curtain again drew up, it was indeed on a different scene!

CHAPTER XXV.

OLD THINGS PASS AWAY.

THAT mournful and blighting autumn had passed, and a seasonable frosty winter had also glided by. It was again spring. The avenue was already green, and all seemed in holiday array, when a merry burst from the old church tower announced the arrival of Sir Edward and the new Lady Templar; and in that gay, light, modern carriage, also sat Florence. She looked out eagerly—up at my window. I thought I could read hope and happiness in the hasty glance, and her late letters had also given me this impression.

I must pause ere I attempt to speak of the change from the ancient and somewhat sombre grandeur of the desolate deserted house, to the present glittering brilliancy at the Barton. A shadow from the grave comes over me as I speak. Voices long, long hushed in death, sound in my ears;

memories of grief, bereavement, and solemn, loving words obscure everything else! Of all the new doings at the Barton—the remodelling and furnishing—the gay grace and sparkling splendour, I only heard. I went not there. For before that beautiful spring came, the beloved husband, the kind good father had left us.

To be brief: his over fatigue, his night and day work, during that sickly autumn, had told severely on his constitution; and in the rain on the day of Lady Templar's funeral he caught a cold which settled on the lungs. I cannot attempt to describe all that followed; let Florence's remark to me in one of her letters suffice.

Speaking of her sympathy in our trial, she added: "But, Jenny, yours is not sorrow without hope. It is a painful parting, no doubt; many will sorely miss dear Dr. Wilson—how much your mother and you will, I think I can guess; but oh, friend, be happy in your memory of love; be happy that you have had something so precious, even though it be lost. All you say and I hear from others gives me happiness for you; it is soothing—sanctifying."

It was indeed a contrast to her late parting; and though heart-sorrowful, it did not grate on me as ungenial, to find my friend returned apparently

gayer and hopeful with some of her old playfulness of manner. Yet Florence was left anything but an heiress, as she had been taught to expect; for, besides a small settlement, which was hers by right, Lady Templar had, at the last, left everything to her son.

Sir Edward appeared, however, to be kind and liberal towards her; though at times hard and stern. His wife, the lovely little Lady Templar, seemed born to fascinate every one, and had won Florence's love. She was very pretty, and full of an indescribable grace and piquancy. Coquettish and winning, she ruled her grave husband, and under her auspices, the old Barton was completely changed. The old stately furniture, which did not suit her capricious taste, was all put aside into one wainscotted chamber, where she bid Sir Edward and Florence go and feast on their ancestral pride whenever they liked; for her part, she liked ottomans and couches, and "loves of low chairs!" And so also the quaint arrangement of the flower garden was altered. Lady Templar abhorred a straight line; so the old walks were curved, and turf laid, and plashing fountains added, till it seemed like herself—a Lady Vagary, as her husband called her—all beauty and brightness, following no rule, but that of impulsive, eccentric taste. She professed to hate ceremony

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as much as she did formal walks, and so the society at the Barton assumed a different tone. It was described as very pleasant, very brilliant, for she threw a witchery over everything. Some ladies, fond of the good old ways—and there are always some such—found occasion to doubt and half condemn; they liked the former habits of the house better; but the young were all charmed, and Lady Templar set the fashion, from a shoe-knot to a curtain drapery.

The Barton was also a peculiarly favourite resort for gentlemen. They liked the ease, the luxury, and the “sans ceremonie,” and Sir Edward’s rare wines; and perhaps, more than all, at least to a few, was the rare gift of song which his lovely little wife possessed. Her singing was very beautiful, and her cleverness at acting as great. In fact it was whispered, and perhaps with truth, that she had been educated for the stage. However that was, every one agreed in thinking her a bewitching little syren, privileged to do and to say differently from other mortals; and when after a time the grave matrons of Templar Cross shook their heads and hoped their daughters might not follow such an example, and prophesied that no good would come of it, Florence—the discreet, grave Florence—excused her sister, saying,

"She has been so much abroad, and is so thoughtless and childlike! She means no harm!"

But where was Sir Alexander Onslow, you will say? What place did the worthy baronet take in the glittering scene?

He was brooding over disappointed hopes in Scotland. His sensible sister, suspecting how the case stood, and loving and valuing her brother too well to like to trust to such a marriage, entreated him to be advised, and not to take a wife, who not only did not love him, but was supposed to be attached to another.

Lady Templar had left no charge to her son, as Florence had dreaded she would, and Sir Edward said that Florence might do as she liked. So the match was broken off, and Florence, with her blighted beauty, and altered prospects, was again free.

She read, and drew, and seemed to take a new and earnest interest in improving her mind. There was a passing cloud, when her brother occasionally spoke imperiously, Templar-fashion, and she might, under other circumstances, have felt her altered position keenly; always having to give way to her sister-in-law, who almost exclusively engrossed the attention of the company. But in that company—

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T him in town. He was now content to be at for Grange, and not being one who could exist idle, he was at this time intent on improving all the roads in the neighbourhood, thereby making work for the labouring poor, and bestowing a lasting benefit on the neighbourhood.

We saw but little of him; not that he was deficient in attention, for he often called, and never forgot to send fruit and flowers, and to supply me with books; but my poor mother, who never lifted her head, as it were, after my father's death, could not make up her mind to see any one but the Rector and Florence.

We lived secluded, but very peacefully; that long time of rest and calm rises now as a blessing to me: and my deep and ever increasing interest in

to keep me from anything like
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that constant flow of visitors—there was something which blinded Florence to all else.

She was wholly absorbed with one thought, one hope! Mr. Graham was a daily visitor at the Barton—on good terms with Sir Edward and Lady Templar; a privileged guest, as it seemed. This blunted the edge of what would otherwise have been a trying position.

Mr. Graham appeared to have concluded his business, or whatever it might be, which at one time kept him in town. He was now content to be at the Grange, and not being one who could exist idle, he was at this time intent on improving all the roads in the neighbourhood, thereby making work for the labouring poor, and bestowing a lasting benefit on the neighbourhood.

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We lived secluded, but very peacefully; that long time of rest and calm rises now as a blessing to me: and my deep and ever increasing interest in

Florence served to keep me from anything like dullness. I ought to add, that my health became so wonderfully improved, that a new charm was thrown on my path.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FLIGHT.

WHEN Florence came to see us at this period, my mother was wont to call her "Sunbeam." There was something so soft, so loving in her manner; and so glad and bright!—so much less variable in mood!

One day I asked her if she was engaged to Mr. Graham. I shall never forget the change of countenance—the sudden flush of colour—the agitation which she strove to suppress.

"Why do you ask that?" she said, almost angrily.

"Because it is reported that you are; and I would fain know the truth."

"Is it reported?—is it? I would thank them not to make me the subject of report!" She spoke very haughtily.

I made no reply; and presently she came round to where I was sitting, and said quietly, and as if with effort—

“I suppose you consider a parchment signed, sealed, and delivered, necessary; *you* would not trust to this,” holding up a little cameo ring; “or—or to all that which can be so deeply felt and expressed, yet not spoken or written.”

“Oh no, Florence; if I was over-cautious, it was from my great anxiety for your happiness; and, besides, a ring is often a pledge, I suppose—only, you know Mr. Graham is rather difficult to read off clearly.”

Again an angry flush—and, as I thought, a keen look of pain. She winced under my words, as if they were knives.

“And because he cannot be measured to the exact square rule of every other common-place mortal, he is to be distrusted and blamed! But oh, Jenny, I trust him! I will tell you, that notwithstanding all—my face—my fortune—still I dare to hope! He made no pledge or promise with this ring, for he gave Lucy one as well. Hers was opal—characteristic, as he said, of her; yet his look and manner—after all, there is more in that than strings of protestations! And then,

why is he always at our house?—why does he ride and walk with us?”

I could make no answer, but I involuntarily sighed—which brought down some sharp reproach, and then a tender kiss to make peace; and so we parted. I often afterwards remembered that morning.

There was a sweet, calm silence in our room, one evening before candle-time. My mother was taking a little dose; and I, stealing a look now and then at her faded, drooping form, watched the passers-by, and tried to conjure up a more perfect faith in Mr. Graham. One of the curious coincidences which often occur happened on that evening, for the postman brought a long letter from Cousin Charles. He spoke of himself as having had the smallpox, but having entirely escaped a mark—his sun-tanned, worthless phiz was spared, and hers destroyed! Then followed burning words of self-blame; yet again speaking of Mr. Graham as a bad man, and praying that her eyes might be opened to his true character. Lastly, he wound up with a touching, earnest hope, in few and manly words, that he might be permitted to minister to her happiness—no change of feature could destroy his love. If the time

should ever come that she could cease to blame him as her destroyer—if she could ever endure him—how glad he would be to devote everything to her! He spoke of success, and prizes, and hopes of realizing some money in the course of a few years, if his life was spared. Not that he cared much about it for himself—he had enough for his wants—but to put him in a better position in the eyes of her to whom his income would be a mere pittance.

My mother's tears stained the paper, as she read and re-read the letter; and we sat on, talking quietly of him and of Florence, always returning to the subject of Mr. Graham with half sentences, suppressed sighs, and heavy thoughts.

The evening sped on. It was nearly eleven, when I rose to urge my mother to go to bed. Before I had lit the night-lamp, we heard a loud knocking at the front-door, and Florence burst in upon us. She was dressed as for a party, but her hair was disordered and wild, and the flush of angry and offended pride lit up her eyes. She spoke rapidly, and as if panting for breath.

"Mrs. Wilson! I come to beg a night's lodging. I crave your protection; for never, never again do I re-enter those dreadful doors!"

I here signed to Florence to be calmer, for my mother was little able to stand such an agitating scene. She understood me, and with great self-command came close to her, and kneeling down by her chair, she took her hand, and prayed her not to be angry or worried. Then, as my poor mother seemed mutely to implore explanations, in subdued words, she said that for some time her brother had been stern and overbearing, and had more than once alluded to her dependence on him, in a way neither pleasant nor easy to bear. There had been company that day at dinner, and Lady Templar had sung to her lute as usual. She had sung Florence's favourite, a Spanish serenade, in her most thrilling style; and Mr. Graham had been exceedingly delighted with it. She hesitated and paused as she reached this point; then rallied courage, as it were, and went on.

“ Well, Mr. Graham, according to a fashion of his, presented some flowers to Lucy by way of thanks, and there was a little badinage, and blushing, and so forth. All at once I looked up and caught Sir Edward standing in the doorway, like some avenging spirit, scowling at us so darkly ! and very soon he beckoned me out.

“ We went into his own room, where, shutting the

door, he accused me of plotting against his honour and happiness. Of course I was astonished, and with me pride and coldness from another always begets the like. I grew stony as he spoke so hardly. Well, he proceeded to say that he was determined not to stand it any longer; and when I asked 'What?' he told me that was mere hypocrisy; for that I *must* know what he meant: no one could help seeing Mr. Graham's attentions to his wife, and her pleasure in them. He said he had already had stormy words about it, with her, but she was a mere child. Many awful oaths and threats he added, and wound up by daring me, as I valued his protection, to encourage and abet such iniquity; that Lucy never did such a thing till I showed her the way. I was astonished, and I tried to make him understand that Mr. Graham's visits to the house were not exactly for the sake of Lady Templar's society: in fact, after a while, I plainly told him my hopes."

She had been playing with her ring as she spoke, but stopped and put her hands to her temples, as if to still the throbbing, and her voice rose to wildness as she added—

"And then he turned on his heel, and with withering contempt—I can never, never forget it!—he hissed out words like these:—'You—you—ugly,

scarred creature! You! Mr. Graham—he think of you? You strangely forget yourself, methinks.’ But I cannot repeat all that he said. It was horrible!—cruel! I rose. I was as quiet as if made of stone, and I said, ‘Farewell, Edward! we are parted for ever.’ And now, now, kind friends, let me stay here! only for a while—only a short time; for—oh! it is true!”—again she touched her ring —“my brother was wrong. There is at least one noble, generous heart faithful to Florence Templar, fallen as she may be in the world’s estimation.”

Here her over-restrained feelings gave way to violent weeping. We tried to soothe her, and bid her kindly welcome; while laying her head on my mother’s knee, she still cried bitterly.

“Cruel words—cruel, cruel brother!” she sobbed. “He might have spared me; but I am as proud as he is. I will depend no longer on his bounty. He shall pay me my own fortune, and, small as it may be, it shall suffice. He forgot that he talked to Florence Templar!”

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE NEWS.

I HAVE a strong belief in the vanity of men, though that feeling is one usually ascribed entirely to my own sex. I believe that many a downfall from high aspirations to a lower level may be traced to vanity. Many an ill-assorted marriage may be traced to a man's vanity and proneness to be flattered by women.

Mr. Gordon Graham was vain—vain and self-indulgent, though it was skilfully hidden. But instead of moralising from data since supplied, I must return to my tale.

My last thought that night was, now Mr. Graham must speak or be silent for ever. Florence is not prone to see or believe in love—and true love, such as hers, is wont to be timid—yet she is sure. He cannot then be worldly. I began to believe that he was sure to come to-morrow, and settle all.

It was a thoroughly settled rainy day. Not a

hope existed in the shape of a clearing sky. It was dark, heavy, and gloomy, with rain-clouded windows, and a constant patter on the staircase skylight.

Florence was up betimes, and appeared to me cheerful during breakfast. She admired our china and dainty fine old table linen, and insisted on helping me to carry up my mother's tea and toast. Then she stationed herself at the window, and surveyed the wet streets with a thoughtful air.

"It is not a day for any one to come out," I remarked.

"Oh, yes—on horseback!"

"But does he know where you are, Florence?"

"I left a note with my maid; and he was quite certain to be there to-day—very early. I expect him every moment."

I saw that her eyes glistened, as if tears were there; and she again looked out, and played her fingers nervously on the window.

"You won't disturb my faith," she presently said. "Oh, Jenny, at last—at last, I feel the crisis at hand! Great joy and great grief shake hands sometimes. From the flutter here in my heart, I could almost fancy it pain."

I was trying to write to Cousin Charles; and the old clock ticked just as it had done on the

evening he said "Farewell." It seemed to bring up that hour so vividly, that I could only pause, while a whole host of memories were fast passing before me: through hours of hope and hours of disappointment—from childhood till now—had that old clock ticked on, with monotonous complacency; and its voice had strange power!

Florence moved, and approached to look my old friend in the face. "Ten o'clock! Oh, I thought it was later!" and she took up a book, but not as if she meant to read it.

I wrote on. The old clock had inspired me. Fast and free came my words. But that letter was never finished. I have it now, with the large blot which stopped my sentence—that blot of fright, as my pen dropped from my hand.

One of my brothers came very hastily into the room, just as my mother was creeping down-stairs. He began with—"Oh, Jenny, have you heard the news?" then stopped short, looked at Florence, and blushed scarlet.

"What news?" asked Florence. "Pray do not mind me; you look at me as if I were an ogress."

Still Jem coloured, and looked from one to another, and played with his hat.

"What is it, Jem?" I said.

He pointed towards Florence, and shook his head. She looked up again at the moment and saw the gesture.

"Speak out!" she said, in an imperious tone, "for I see it concerns me. Pray inform me what piece of news you have picked up, or what the good town is saying of last night's affair at the Barton?"

"It is not about you," Jem said, bluntly, and not quite liking or understanding her manner.

My mother was now at the door. Florence and I both rose to place her chair and cushions, and she smiled on us both with gracious pleasure. Jem tried to make off; but as he evidently wished to impart his news to some one, he touched my arm and signed for me to follow him.

"Make him speak out," said Florence. "It is very rude, Jem, to have secrets before ladies;" and she tried to laugh, still busying herself about my mother's comfort.

"If you must know, the news is," said Jem, "that Mr. Graham is gone."

"Jem! come here; mind what you are saying! Idle gossip!" I said, hardly knowing what I did say, yet feeling sure something ill would come

out ; and I seized his arm, and was pulling him away.

" Mr. Graham ! What of him ? Jenny, pray allow him to speak out ! I have a right to hear all ! "

" Well, Mr. Graham is gone off, full tilt, as fast as four capital blood horses can go ! John Smith at the toll-bar saw them go by like mad ! And they say—but of course that isn't true—that Sir Edward is raving. "

" Them ? You said them ? Sir Edward, do you mean ? " I exclaimed.

Florence let her book fall, and drew herself to her full height, while, with her arm upraised, she said in a hoarse whisper—

" Forbear, boy ! How dare you fabricate such an untruth—such a wicked report—— "

She was stopped by a loud rap at the door, and the Rector entered, looking too full of concern and trouble for us to doubt what brought him. He told the same tale—that Mr. Graham and Lady Templar had left together, and that Sir Edward had started after them. And the good, kind-hearted Rector paused to hope they would not meet, or there would be blood shed.

Florence, who had thrown herself into a chair when Mr. King entered, sat all this time as

immoveable as a statue, with her eyes fixed on the Rector's face. The only sign of life was the hasty movement of the nostril, and the flashing glare of her eyes. Mr. King soon ceased speaking, and rose to depart. He had been sent on his painful errand, he said, by poor Sir Edward. It was indeed an awful business; but for a long time he had been uneasy about Mr. Graham himself: there was no principle about him; he was very deep—very artful, he said.

A hasty gesture from Florence seemed to silence him, and quickened the old man's departure. He cast a look full of pity on her, but did not address her.

When the door was shut, she rose and went up to my mother. Her lips moved, but no word came, after several vain attempts at articulation. Then she went out of the room, slowly, and feeling her way, as it were, like a blind person. I followed her up-stairs, but as she reached her room, she waved me back.

“No, no, Jenny! Alone—alone!”

There was a solemn silence about our house all day; for, after the first stir, and the agitation of my mother, we kept very still and quiet. It was

too still. I listened at Florence's door, with fearful anxiety, and not a sound—not a step could I hear. At dinner-time we knocked, but no answer came. Again, towards evening, I went and entreated her to open the door, but there was no reply.

Then word was brought that Sir Edward had returned, and that the servants had sent for the Rector and a medical man. Nothing could be learnt of the fugitives; and the whole town-business seemed at a stand-still—while people gathered together to hear, and to tell, and to wonder.

Another event added to the excitement of the town. It was getting dark, when, as I afterwards heard, a carriage, recognised as one of the Grange carriages, drove up to the Golden Lion, and a woman very much muffled up, with a little boy, stepped out. She was in a state of dreadful excitement, and in the greatest haste to go on. She ordered a chaise and pair at once, and told the kind landlady when she asked "Where?" that "it did not matter much; anywhere, so that it was far, far from here."

It was remarked that she had flashing jewels on her fingers, and a long thick chain of gold hanging quite down. Distorted as her features were with grief and passion, her silken black hair, and her

peculiarly lovely shape, were remarked and remembered. Her broken English proved her to be a foreigner; but no one had ever seen her before. She passed away like an apparition, and it was not till after that these particulars were noted; for others monopolized all the interest, work, and talk of the place. She was never heard of again. The man who had driven her went on with her, leaving the carriage to the care of the landlord, to go back to the Grange by the first opportunity.

I went to Florence's room again to tell her that her brother had returned. Anything to rouse her—to force an answer.

At last, she undid the bolt and stood before me, holding the door, however, so as to prevent my entering.

Was it—could it be Florence, in the body? I asked myself—that ghastly looking woman!

“Jenny!” she said, in a dull, hollow voice. “You are cruel! why tease me?”

“Florence!” I answered, “I will not leave you in this state—you must take some nourishment. Florence!”—seeing that she tried to close the door against me—“Florence! you shall not do so. If I am cruel, I can't help it. Are you going to give yourself up to madness, Florence?”

At these words she let go her hold of the door.

"Well, give me some wine. I will do anything; but don't alarm or excite yourself. See! I am quite calm! I am well—quite well—only I must be alone! Jenny, let me be quiet—only for a short time!"

"Very well; if you will take this, Florence, you shall not be disturbed; only my poor mother is quite ill from anxiety about you."

"I will not try her long: only have a little patience, Jenny, and all will be right; and don't talk of me—don't let people guess!"

"Trust me, dear Florence!" I said, heart moved by her grief-stricken voice; and having seen her take some nourishment, I returned to my mother a little relieved.

But I could not go to bed. I sat in my room with no light but that of a watery, young moon, shedding a pale, shadowy glimmer on the rain-drenched streets and dark, wet lime-trees. My room was very nearly opposite to that one occupied by Florence.

All was perfectly still, and the church clock rang out hour after hour, till after one. I felt worn and weary with the anxious time; and creeping quietly once more to her door, and finding everything so still, I thought I would lie down, still leaving my door open, in case she should call or ring.

A high wind had risen, and whistled wildly round the house, causing several doors to rattle. One seemed to shut and creak—was it the wind? or was Florence moving? I sat up to listen, and then I saw a white figure glide swiftly and noiselessly by my door; and again the wind rushed round with a moaning, wailing sound, and my door banged loudly.

I hastily got up, and with every nerve strung to pain, I went down-stairs. The surgery door was open; I went on; and there she stood—near the window for a little light; and she was in the act of pouring from a bottle into her tumbler.

“Florence!” I exclaimed, at the same time dashing the phial out of her hand. “O Florence! God forgive you!”

She turned fiercely, almost like some savage animal, and raised the tumbler to her lips, in which she had already poured some of the fatal juice. But I seized her hand and shook it wildly, till it was all spilt about us, not heeding her shrill cry or her passionate exclamations.

To this hour I do not understand how I acted as I did, or how I had the strength. I assumed a determined air of authority, and treated her like a naughty child—bidding her return to bed directly. At this she threw herself upon me, and

cried—sobbed and cried and clung to me ; till, quite worn out, I helped her, unresisted, up-stairs, and laid her on her bed.

Then, with her poor burning hand in mine, I repeated in a low voice psalms and verses, till at last the sobbing ceased, and she slept.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DEATH.

FLORENCE was saved — saved from suicide and insanity ; but death went not without his prey.

The thread of my mother's life — before worn very weak — now snapped under the pressure and shock of this new trouble ; but in her gentle requirements Florence found her best cure. She roused herself from stupor to minister to my mother.

It was indeed a "calm decay" — a quiet, hopeful passing away, worthy of the true and simple life which had gone before.

The Barton was again shut up. Dark whispers reached us about Sir Edward's state, now and then ; but he never came back, or kept up any communication with our town ; and his sister received her money through his lawyer.

She felt this alienation much. Her heart yearned

for love—certainly in her own kith and kin she found but little. For her sake, after my mother's death, I determined to leave my old home for a time. Too many associations clung to it, and the Grange was all too near.

My brothers were settled out in the world, so that I was free to devote myself to my friend; and my health had much improved of late; I could almost do as others did; and though never able to take long walks, I threw aside all support or wheel-chairs.

So we two spinsters, still young as we were, set up housekeeping together, at a distant sea place, and strangers lived in my old home, while the rooks held uninterrupted sway at the Barton; and again the old gate was tinted with Time's mellow colours, and little Lady Templar's sparkling fountains became choked and foul—just symbols of her own career.

We were sitting by our fireside, and the wind blew keenly without—entering every possible crevice with moan and wail, or more gustily rattling doors and windows, and sending puffs of smoke into our faces. Florence had been very weak and tired all day. She often was so now; and her once rounded figure was thin and sharp. I had been

looking at her, and trying to compute the change I felt, and wishing for something to rouse her.

“Jenny!” she said, holding up the newspaper, “have you seen the news?—‘Commander Charles Sutton, to be Captain,’ &c. So he is posted; and I see the ‘Oberon’ is coming home. With his prizes, Captain Charles will be looking up, eh? I am glad he is coming home.”

She spoke with an animation I had not seen for a long, long time.

“Are you glad?” I said. “Why, then, so am I; but I don’t wish him to be disappointed, Florence.”

She did not answer again; but I was startled some time after, to feel her hands on my shoulders. I could not see her face—she was behind me—but her voice was low, and full of feeling.

“He won’t be disappointed, my poor little Jenny. All will be right, I am sure. But, Jenny, let me warn you; ’tis best to speak plainly now—at once. If you mean, or think for a moment that, even supposing such a very unlikely thing as that he should wish it now—if you think I ever can return his or any man’s love—you are wrong. I am glad to see him again as your cousin—as a friend—and a pleasant man; no more—not a tittle more.”

“ Oh, Florence! I am sure he loves you yet; and won't his long devotion—his faithful love—avail with you to make him happy at last?”

“ As to his loving me yet, he won't when he sees me. I understand him—I know all about it. Oh, no! I should never have made him happy—I could never return his love: it was not the sort to attract me. Besides, a woman who—who once loves, afterwards to patch up a marriage on the dregs—the ashes! No, no! I could not do it! I can face my loneliness with you: by your unfailing kindness, Jenny, I have been up-borne, and now—now I feel my journey is coming to an end. Yes, dear, don't shrink—don't disbelieve me; it is so! I am glad; why should you grieve? Mine has been a troubled lot, partly from my own disposition; but, God be thanked, I have been spared one bitter drop, which I dreaded, Jenny! I gladly believe Dr. Orme, when he said there was a consuming fever in my veins—that I was in a decline, in fact. I have only one thing more to wish! Don't weep, Jenny! Remember what you saved me from, faithful little friend—uncomplaining, solitary one. What would Florence Templar have done without you!”

This was the only time she ever alluded to

Charles's old attachment ; and for a short time after this conversation she seemed to rally : then I gathered hope, and turned my thoughts from the grave, and from the utter loneliness which would be mine without her.

Charles's return was delayed ; we were in the middle of spring before he came. Well do I remember that day. Florence was pretty well, and had had a good night. She was reading. I was arranging flowers, when a rap at the door announced a visitor. In a moment he stood by me—himself—the very same ; yet how changed—browner, stouter, but with the same clear blue eye and quick turn of the head—the same little, stiff curl of the mouth—and the same earnest, hearty shake of the hand.

He claimed a kiss from his "little cousin ;" and then, turning round, with my hand still in his, seemed uncertain how to approach or address Florence. I saw a flush spread over his face, as she rose, and, with a graciousness she had never shown to him, held out both hands, welcoming him home in her clear, sweet voice. I felt him tremble. But great must have been the change to him ! He was now for the first time looking at the mischief he had wrought. She talked for us all—asked questions, and told the news. I

longed to leave them; but, as if she guessed my intention, she soon rose and said she was going to hasten our tea, for the traveller's benefit.

He opened the door for her; and when she was gone, threw himself on a chair, covering his face and exclaiming—

“ Good heavens! is it possible? Is that the brilliant Florence Templar?”

Then he rose and paced up and down the room, asking many questions rapidly, and with a frown—
“ Where was Graham, the heartless villain? Was Florence well off? Where was her brother?” &c.
And when, at last, I touched on her health, he came and sat by me, took my hand, and resuming his own tender manner, said—

“ You are a good friend to her, Jenny; but don't talk of her dying!—don't, for pity's sake! She will recover. We will nurse her—you and I. Oh, she will—she must hearken to me now, at last! I am no longer a poor man—I can offer her a home. We will travel—rouse her, cheer her; and she shall forget the dreadful past. I care not for her altered face. Poor soul!—poor soul! That I—I who would have lost a limb for her gladly—should have been the means of bringing such an affliction on *her*! Good God! But she shall forget

it! All this time—all these years—I have lived but to make reparation. She must be mine! She shall be cherished as never woman was before. You will plead for me, cousin Jenny; will you — will you?”

And he looked into my eyes as he spoke, his own look becoming more and more earnest; for I know I paused ere I said, with a solemn kind of feeling, inwardly invoking God's help, “Charles I will do all I can. To see you and Florence happy is all—almost all——” I broke down—a sense of loneliness pressed heavily on me. I was ashamed of myself; but I turned from him and shed tears. I could not help it.

Immediately he began to soothe me. He was unfeeling, he said, to have been so unmindful of my trials. My mother—ah, he did miss her! though he seemed to have forgotten her. I must forgive his apparent selfish impetuosity.

Meanwhile, I recovered myself, and began to tell him how little chance he had with Florence. How dead her heart was, and how precarious her life. It was better for him to know at once the truth, and not to increase his after disappointment by false hopes.

But she returned, and he put away deep subjects

for that evening, and over our tea spun many a yarn for us in pleasant fashion, which brought up old times ; but still we were cheerful, if not gay, for none could withstand that joyous, merry voice, which had lost none of its youthful charms.

The limits and purpose of this tale would not allow me to linger on each day as it passed, even were it possible. When once the excitement attending Charles's return was over, our lives returned to their former monotone. There was little to mark the time ; hour followed hour, each laden with its own burden, each with its own hope. But though a great work was carrying on before my eyes—the transformation and loosening of an earnest but faulty soul from earthly ties and life—I cannot speak of it.

Perhaps, I noticed at the end of a month that Florence's garments hung more loosely on her ; and that she did less in the way of exertion through the day. But then summer came, and for a brief space seemed to give her new strength. Charles, after visiting some friends, had returned to —, and taken lodgings near us. It was at this time that a widowed cousin of my father's—an elderly person, needing a home—came to reside with us. Mrs. Carey was a good, sensible woman, who had seen more trouble than joy in her life, but in spite of a little stern

gloom which made her manners untaking, we soon found her presence a valuable addition to our party, as well as a protection which we were still young enough to need.

Our occupation was nursing Florence. Charles drew the wheel-chair which took her to the beach, and often read aloud to us. At first Florence could hardly stand this. Her thoughts flew back to other readings—to another voice; but she evidently struggled against it, and in time entered into the plan with interest: indeed she seemed to encourage Charles being with us, and even to find work for him. Many a “handy” contrivance the sailor made, for the better arrangement of those numberless etceteras which are essential to an invalid. Very pleasant, in spite of the fading away before our eyes, were those meetings on the glittering yellow sands, when Florence’s chair was drawn to the very edge of the waves; or when the tide was in, we retreated under the cliff, and sat on the rocks by her side. Sometimes she would send Charles off with me for a short stroll; she was anxious I should make use of my new power of walking, and proudly pointed out to Charles all I could do.

“We have changed places, Captain Sutton. Jenny used to be the lady in the chair, and in those days I

silently wondered how she could endure it! Now I have learnt to think it a great luxury."

I wondered sometimes at Charles's cheerfulness. Sometimes I fancied he did not realize Florence's state, or perhaps he put on that gaiety for her sake. I was sure he must see, from the very familiarity and ease of her manner, how far she was from returning his old love. Indeed he very soon threw off that himself, and seemed to follow her lead, being like a brother, or a cousin, rather than a lover.

So time sped, and we were in July when Charles was summoned away on business. There was a prospect of his being appointed to a ship, and being sent on some expedition of trust. He said he was very unwilling to leave, and after he really was gone, unwonted dulness brooded over our party.

Florence became very silent, partly from weakness. She would lie all day watching the sea or the sky, or looking wistfully at times on the gay crowds on the distant terrace walk. She seldom spoke, except to ask for what she wanted.

One evening Mrs. Carey was not with us; she had remained at home with headache. Florence had beckoned me to come close to her. We were on the beach watching the tide come in somewhat freshly,

and amused by several pleasure boats discharging their passengers. Some few, managing to ride in skilfully on the crest of a wave and pushing on the sand, the sitters landed safe and dry; but others were not so lucky, and peals of merry laughter followed any mishap of wetting trowsers or dress.

There had been a regatta not far off, and the whole bay had been dotted with boats. Florence took my hand in hers.

“What day of the month is it, Jenny? I don’t know why, but I feel strangely to-day. The shadow of something seems to have passed over me. Do you ever feel that? I have been thinking of Fanny. Something in that bright, pretty girl, a while ago, brought Fanny vividly before me. Is it a warning, think you? Am I—can I be going to see her soon?”

Florence seldom alluded to her death. A few very earnest talks we had had, so that there was no reserve about it; but it was not her nature to say much about what she felt most deeply. She knew she was going—she was not unwilling to go; but she was not nervous at every change in herself, and so anticipating the time over and over again; nor did she like talking of it. All this made her manner this evening more striking—more significant to me. *

Our attention was caught by the in-coming of a pleasure-yacht, nearer to us than any of the others. There were loud voices directing the steerage; and we both turned towards the busy scene. Several gentlemen jumped safely to land—two remained; and the boat swung round, so as to upset them. They fell on each other, amid the gay laugh of their comrades. Florence's hand was tightly pressed in mine; a bright flush passed over her face, to which a deathly pallor succeeded. She half raised herself; and her breath came very rapidly, as she looked eagerly towards the boat.

"Steady! the next wave will carry us in!" called out a voice we both knew too well; and with the wave the boat slid on to the sand and gravel with a harsh, grating noise. They leapt out. He came last—talking still to the other. As he passed, he looked at us, in the careless unmeaning way people look at strangers, visibly started, half turned, and raised his hat. Their eyes met; but she had sunk back now, completely overcome. He made a sort of rapid half-step towards her, and muttered, "Good God! is it possible!" then hastily turned away and overtook his party.

She did not faint, but her breathing was painful; and she fixed her eyes on my face with an expression

of such absolute sorrow as I never saw before. It was, at once, so wistful, despairing, and yet so calm: her whole heart and soul were in the look. I did not understand till then *how* she had loved!

I took her home. She never left the house again alive. She had taken her last look at the sea and cliffs. She never noticed another sky: his image was stamped on her last earthly pleasure.

She was much worse that night, and suffered intensely. In one of the intervals of comparative ease she gasped out with difficulty, "So I have seen him! Remember! I forgive—quite, Jenny! I don't blame him!—I am sorry—I know he loved me. He never knew how, or in what measure, I loved him—never! How should he? No man could. It was Lady Templar! I wonder where—Poor little woman! If—if—you or Charles ever see him, tell him I wish him well; say Florence prayed for him!"

There were three days and three nights of sad, sad pain—nobly, bravely borne. But she was as meek and gentle as a little child. Not for nothing did you suffer, O Florence! Never in your hour of brightest brilliancy were you more winning and beautiful than when you tried to smile encouragement on me out of your pain, and, laying aside your

natural independent haughtiness—which, too, had its own charm—you received every small attempt to please so graciously! Oh, Florence, Florence!

The pain had ceased. She lay, or rather reclined, on numerous pillows, faint and oppressed. It was a soft, starlight night, and through the open window we could catch the distant rush of the tide. “Poor Jenny!” she whispered, “you will be lonely!” Soon after, she said, “Kiss me: I am so tired!” and smiling, she shut her eyes and turned her head a little aside on the pillow, and fell into a deeper sleep than she had had for many nights.

As I sat, I could look away from the bed, through the window, towards the eastern sky. A large, beautiful star caught my attention, and back came a crowd of memories: our old life at Templar Cross—old Sir Edward—ah! thank God! Florence was spared his fate; that pompous funeral array which had so struck me as a child; the deserted Barton; then the glad arrival of those young, beautiful girls, and that peal of welcoming bells—I could hear them now!—That pale star!—Cousin Charles, and his mad love, and all that time: tears filled my eyes. And then I heard a faint sound, besides her breathing, which had become longer and quieter—I hardly knew what it was: her hand

still lay in mine; I felt for the pulse—there was none! Mrs. Carey, who had been close to me for the last ten minutes, felt also: “her spirit has fled,” she whispered.

Good Mrs. Carey’s voice, reading the prayers for the dying, reached me, as a far off sound. Some one lifted me from my knees and bore me away to another room.

The fresh early morning air breathed on my face and roused me. I looked up, and saw the star. Florence was gone. I was all alone in the world now. She had been my star! I felt numb—stony—confused—conscious of some great blow—dreading to think or look on to the next hour.

I suppose my powers had been over-taxed; for the next few weeks after that night is a blank.

I had a severe attack of nervous fever; and it was a long, tedious recovery. Mrs. Carey was very kind, and when I was able to move, she granted my request and went with me to Templar Cross.

Oh, how hard it seemed to look forward to life then! My brothers were in distant lands, settled and happy; they wrote kindly, and offered me a home; but they did not need me—no one did. Even Mrs. Carey had found a better offer; and

would have gone to a married niece, where her presence was useful and welcome, but for my loneliness.

I was well provided for; quite above needing to work for my living. I had to make work for myself—to carve out new interests; for to life I was sent back, and perhaps many a long year lay before me yet.

Truly, I did feel forlorn, as I sat at the window of the old inn, looking down the street where my old home stood.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CHRISTMAS GREETING.

I WAS again in the old house! It was like some fever dream, that I should be there alone. At first, the rooms seemed to be peopled with shadows. I even caught myself listening for my mother's tread or my father's voice; but very soon I became accustomed to the silence. Oh, it was dreary work, to rise in the morning and wonder what I should or could do through the day; but I struggled against this mournful leisure, and drew up rules for every hour. I read and worked and wrote by the clock, and tried to make occupation about the house and garden; but the sense of loneliness returned constantly, and was like a wet blanket in its effects. I visited among the poor, and for a time cheated myself into a feeling of being useful; but sorely did I yearn for a loving look, or such words as these—"Where have you been? How

I have wanted you!" No one now wanted me! Mrs. Carey was a self-dependent woman; not given to any demonstration of affection. I knew if I were out all day she would not miss me. The Rector and his niece—for the eldest was married—insisted on my spending Christmas Eve with them. Mrs. Carey was with her relations. I consented; but would not give up my solitary Christmas Day. I had determined to be alone then, and enjoy the luxury of calling up old memories, without being obliged to wear a smiling face.

It was, I well remember, a wet, chilly Christmas Day. Not a gleam of blue sky peeped out on us. The Barton avenue, with its grass-grown walk, looked very doleful. After church, I stirred the fire, and drew my chair near it. The house was very still, for I had sent the servants to their friends. Sick at heart, I went to the window to take a look at the old Barton, and wondered if, on that day, there might not be some more aching and miserable hearts than mine. Sir Edward! Poor man, he had loved his wife with all his soul; never seeing a fault in her. Her lightsome, gleeful nature broke down the icy barriers in his own reserved disposition. Unyielding to every one else, to her he was

devoted. The whole thing was a mystery to me—Mr. Graham's carrying on so double a game, his base betrayal of his friend's confidence, and of Florence's love. Had he been aware of it all? or had he himself been the victim of some sudden temptation, and been hurried unawares into the deed? He was vain!—No doubt of Mr. Graham's vanity. Lady Templar had flattered him; also her beauty was very winning, and her gift of singing had great effect on him; yet I always believed he was attached to Florence, and had felt her disfigurement as a great blow. Other reports returned to my mind. That singular, half-distracted, foreign woman—strange stories had been afloat—Ah! perhaps, among all, none was to be pitied so much as Gordon Graham! If he had any heart at all, a day of reckoning must come; if he was heartless, what could be more hopeless or miserable?

The Grange was let. He could not face the neighbourhood, and had let it on a long lease. Report said he had left Lady Templar and was living in London. My thoughts ran on now about him, and about the old days when he sauntered in the Barton gardens, quoting Italian, and poor Cousin Charles and his jealousy, and his fervent love; and

then I began to wonder at not hearing from Charles; and the thought of his being in the world seemed to bring a glow to my heart—soon, however, to die out and leave only a blanker darkness. Oh, I felt chill and drear as I silently resolved to meet my allotted destiny with a brave mind; to pass unloved to the grave. No, that need not be. It would be my own fault if I could not win love and affection,—not a personal, exclusive, devoted attachment—that was impossible; but I need not, I would not shut up my heart and indulge in vain morbid regret—I would. . . . In the midst of my resolves, there was a pretty loud rap-tap at the door. Who could it be? No one in, to answer it, but myself! On such a day and at such an hour, however, it could only be a friend. But who? I thought I knew the knock—it savoured of the old times I had been thinking of. Had I raised a spirit? Could it be Mr. Graham?

These surmises passed rapidly through me; but I had lingered long enough to bring another attack on the knocker as well as a ring at the bell, which resounded through the empty passages shrilly. Whoever it is, I must open. It is cold to be kept there. With rather a doubtful and trembling hand, I withdrew the chain and bolt.

"Is Miss Wilson . . . ?"

I heard no more. My hands were grasped—I felt a warm kiss on my forehead.

"Oh, Charles! only think—Is it really you?"

"Is this really you? I may ask. What! little Jenny all alone on Christmas Day—all alone and in darkness! Where is Mrs. Carey?"

He was laying aside wraps, while I answered his questions, and stirred the fire. Soon a blaze threw light round the room, and was caught and reflected in every direction by the shining black walnut furniture.

"I am so sorry! but the servants are out—won't be in till nine; and I can give you no tea or dinner. Have you dined?"

"Oh yes! dined well. But I thought I must make a push and reach the old place on this day. Anchored off Plymouth the day before yesterday. Must run off again in two days. Then after awhile I shall be clear, and shall come here, I think, and rig out my old house: eh? what do you think? But tell me of yourself now. I received your letter. So—it did not last long! To think of that fellow disturbing her last moments!"

"I don't think it did. I think she was glad to have seen him once more."

"Ay, a strange thing is woman's love! Poor

soul, poor soul! Well, we can't wish her back: her voyage is over, and she's in port; and, trust God! safe in a better haven than she found here, in spite of riches and birth."

He leant back, and for some little time remained silent — gazing rather sadly at the fire. Then, rallying, he told me of his voyage and prospects; asked hundreds of questions; and before the servants returned he had so stirred up my interest in different persons whose histories he talked of, that I did not feel so utterly alone. He seemed so brimful and overflowing with life, and energy, and joyousness, that a few stray drops fell to me. At all events, why could I not interest myself in this cousin's welfare? He would marry soon, and then—but no—if he married, the less would he care for me or for my sympathy. Still, in spite of relapses into melancholy musing, I did rally while he was with me. He wanted needlework done, and told me to search out some sempstress; but I undertook it all myself. It was a pleasure to sit and stitch and stitch, to recall his last sunny smile, and listen for his quick tread again. It was a pleasant week: he stayed so long. Mrs. Carey was with me again, and was no interruption to the long talks we fell into about old times.

When he was really gone again, I felt as if the sun was eclipsed, and truly did I re-echo Mrs. Carey's remark, "How much one misses Captain Sutton!" But there was the spring to look forward to, and meanwhile I set myself a great deal of work to do. When about in the town I heard a gossiping rumour that Captain Sutton was to marry Miss King. It might be so. She was very pretty and amiable. Certainly she had taken a great fancy for my company lately, and certainly Charles had once or twice seemed just a very little conscious when anything of his future marrying was talked of. The Rector had been very pressing and attentive too. Yes, I liked Miss King. But somehow I was glad to turn from the idea, and put it away to be settled at some future time. The spring would show.

Charles had been settled in his old quarters for three weeks. He had slipped into his old place too in the society, and was now not only a favourite among the young ladies, but with the mamas. For Captain Sutton with a little fortune of his own, and a young middy, are two different things. He had risen fast in the service, circumstances having seconded his own exertions; and those were brisk times for the navy.

Mrs. Carey and I saw something of Cousin Charles, numerous as were his invitations in the town and neighbourhood. He often made me walk with him; and as, even with my mended powers, I could not reach the many attractive points about the town, he found a quiet pony which carried me. He was always sociable, and we were not always alone. Miss King and other ladies constantly joined these excursions; and then I had to smile at his lively stories, for he was always the life of the party. He would not allow that I could manage "Brown Bess," or give up the guidance of her head to another; and though quiet and gentle, she was just a little fidgetty. Whoever was with us, there Charles invariably walked, though perhaps he and I did not exchange a dozen words. I never was a talker in company.

One evening he had been reading from the newspaper to Mrs. Carey and me. In her grim, stately manner, she relaxed into what was meant for a knowing smile, and asked when Captain Sutton was going to follow his friend's example, of whose marriage he had just read. Charles coloured a little.

"Jenny and I," she continued, "are doubting as to our present. It must be useful, of course."

"So *you* give me away, Jenny." He looked across the table at me.

"Oh, no, I don't," said I, trying to enter into it.

"This is not the first time to-day, I have been told I am going to marry," he said, laughing. "People are very kind and busy."

"Captain Sutton is too gallant to escape being talked of," Mrs. Carey said.

"Fiddle-sticks! Gallant!—of course, I like women well enough, and I am always ready and happy to serve them; but I defy any one to say I have made a fool of myself—or—or——"

"Oh dear no, Captain Sutton! You mistake my meaning, I assure you."

Here Mrs. Carey was summoned out of the room to see her dressmaker.

Charles was deep in the paper again. He had been grave, I thought, for two or three days; and now he was pre-occupied, and evidently answered at random some trifling question I asked. Presently, he threw down the paper, and supported his head on his hands. I thought he sighed—and Cousin Charles's sighs always made one unhappy.

"I wonder if any woman, knowing the circumstances, knowing the truth about me, could—could be

content with my love. Would any one marry me, do you think?"

He did not look at me, and his own face was hidden by his hands. I did not, could not answer; but he went on, as if speaking to himself.

"I don't understand it quite. I am sure I loved her. Love!—it was worship! No poor Hindoo ever worshipped an idol more than I did Florence. Heavens! how she treated me! I was a doating fool; but I was very young. Afterwards, I felt as if bound by every feeling of honour and good faith to devote myself to her, if she accepted it. I did not love her less then, I think—though it was different—but I was older; and, how I hardly know, but I fell easily into her lead. I am glad that there was no contempt or anger on her part at the last—we were friends. Her memory will ever be dear and sacred to me!"

There was a long pause. He got up, went to the window, sat down again; but not facing me. I tried to speak; and said something about my pleasure in seeing that Florence liked to have him with us. But he appeared not to hear what I said.

"Jenny! you don't think me wrong to hope that some day I may be loved as I am sure I

can love? Eh, Jenny? you don't answer. Is it wrong to love again?"

"Oh, no—I suppose not: at least for men it is not uncommon."

"You think, then, a woman would not?"

"Oh, I don't know—I can't tell. I should think not."

"Ay, a strange thing is that love of woman, I believe," he said, sighing as he spoke. "By Heavens! what it must be to win it—to be loved!"

He rose again, and stirred the fire with energy, murmuring to himself as he did so.

It was too dark to work any longer. I leant my head on my hand. A dead heavy weight pressed on my heart. It had lain there for years—for years. To-night it seemed as if it would break my heart: I thought it would. I felt as if the tide of life had suddenly ceased to flow. I expected the next sentence would be about Bessie King. I listened for it with intense pain—actual pain of the nerves, so strung, so stretched were they; but the old clock ticking, and the occasional fall of a cinder, alone broke the silence.

I started, at feeling two hands on my shoulders. "Did I frighten you? Jenny! I want you to hearken to me!" It was a smothered, tremulous

voice that spoke, and I felt him tremble a little. I could feel his breath on my head.

"Tell me truly, Jenny! Is there any chance that you can ever—in time—return my love? It is yours! I think you must have seen it. Ever since I came home, in the summer, I became conscious of it. I believe it lay long before in my heart—buried; but I knew it then. Can you ever return it?"

"Oh, Charles! you know!"

"I know!" he said, removing his hands, and coming to my side. "I know you have always been a kind and affectionate cousin; but I want something else now, Jenny. Can I have it?"

I felt choking—I really could not answer him further than the stupid repetition of—"Oh, Charles!"

"Have I hurt you? My dear Jenny, forgive me! I have been a fool to imagine that you—you who—Oh, forget it, Jenny; forget what I said, and let us be friends, as we always have been. Do forget it!"

"Forget!—Forget that?" I exclaimed.

"What do you mean?" he asked, in his impetuous way, drawing away my hand from my face and looking eagerly at me: I saw by the fitful

firelight that he was flushed and agitated. "Can you ever——?" And then reading something of the truth in my face, perhaps, which his eyes were consulting earnestly—"Do you love me, Jenny?"

Yes, there, in the old familiar room—where I had fought so many silent battles with myself, and where it had been often such agony as well as such delight to see and hear him—there, with my hands firmly clasped in his, I promised to be his wife. And he knew I loved him; but not then, nor for long afterwards, did he know or guess how long my heart had been his, or how hopeless life had often seemed to me without him.

Mrs. Carey, good woman, sent word to say that, as she had a headache, she would rather not come down again, if I would excuse her. I am afraid we did not mind it much. There was a great deal for him to tell, and me to hear. For my part, I could not talk. I felt as if in a dream—so sudden and so unexpected had been the change. I could understand something of what a criminal must feel, when a reprieve is granted. To see him standing there, looking down at me with that light in his eye, that tender happiness in his every tone, and

to know it was for me—little Jenny! I was feeling incredulous every other moment, and again and again my eyes sought his face, to read and be assured of the truth. He had been talking of his prospects, and what he wished to do; he was standing, leaning one elbow on the chimney-piece, whilst I sat on a low seat on the opposite side.

“Come here, Jenny!” he said, with a sudden change of manner and tone. As I rose, he drew me to him; and looking into my eyes, said—“You won’t think worse of me, or doubt my faith to you, because you, and you only, know how I loved her? You loved her yourself. I think—may I say it?—that your gentle ministering to her, in her altered fortune, was the first thing—the first conscious thought I had of your attractions. In reaching for some splendid and rare exotic, we are apt to overlook the sweet violet at our feet. Ah! I remember that poor, wretched Graham calling you a violet one day, and I liked him for appreciating my little cousin. Don’t think me fickle; I don’t feel so. I believe my feelings for her were those of a fiery boy; now, I love as a man. Do you know, Jenny, I think she guessed how it was with me. I fancied so, more

than once; and I believe it gave her pleasure. What are you crying for?" he asked me, as I dashed away a few tears.

"Only at remembering how lonely I was!"

"That, you shall never feel again while I live, so help me God!" he said earnestly, and pressing me close to him. "I wish my dear old aunt could know, that henceforth a stout arm, at least, will shield her little Jenny from the rough world."

At last I was obliged to remind him of the hour. How many times before had I bidden him "Good night!"—now, it had a new charm. And oh that morrow's awakening! A rising up to happiness, not to a weary striving after resignation and courage. To feel it was no dream to be free to love, and to show my love; and to be so well loved in return.

We walked out, and I led him to the churchyard. In the midst of my new found happiness, I could not resist going there. We stopped before a large and emblazoned erection, which was over the Templar vault. There the poor, insane Sir Edward found his rest; there Fanny's gentle, broken heart lay; and there, a prey to corruption, was the cold, proud lady, who had set up her house on high, but had come at last even to this.

Lastly, there lay Florence—the brilliant, high-souled Florence! Hard had been her struggle, but through it she learnt where to gain comfort and peace.

Even with him at my side, now all my own, I wept that she was gone. I wanted her sympathy in my deep happiness. Oh, my friend! Oh, Florence!

THE END.

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